

HUMN 281W, Sections 01/02- FOOD AND FILM¹
California State University, Spring Semester 2019

Syllabus: Version 1.1(January 18, 2019)

[subject to minor amendment or revision; no major changes are anticipated]

Professor: Troy Jollimore

Office: Arts & Humanities 380 Office phone: 898-5122 e-mail: tjollimore@csuchico.edu
Office hours: Wednesday, 1:30-3:00, Tuesday / Thursday: 3:30-4:30

Discussion: Tuesday and Thursday 5:00-5:50, Butte 325
Weekly Wednesday Film Showing: 7:00-9:50 PM, Ayres 106

ABOUT THE COURSE

First, the **official course description**: This course explores themes about food in international cinema, with special attention to the social, cultural and historical context of food as depicted in film, the cultural issues regarding national, ethnic and gender identity, and how the art and history of cinema have presented the many roles that food plays in our lives. This is a General Education Writing course, in The Arts category of the Food Studies GE Pathway.

Second, an important note: **This is not a Film Studies course**. I am not a Film Studies scholar; that is not my area. And this course is not offered under the auspices of Communications, where you would find Film Studies courses; it is offered by the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities. **This is a Humanities Course**. What this means is, we will be looking at culture (the ‘humanities’ are all about culture – history, literature, the arts, philosophy, and in general the various humanistic ways of pursuing knowledge and passing it along) through the double lens of **two of the most significant elements of contemporary culture**: food, and film. We will use *films* as *texts*, in much the way that in other Humanities courses we would use *books* as texts. Of course, we will be using a variety of written texts to supplement the films. This is a Humanities Course, so we will be watching *and* reading.

Food lies at the heart of the films we will watch. In some, it is the main concern of the major characters, and integral to the plot and its outcomes. In others, food functions as a subtle but significant symbol. (Food nearly always carries at least some metaphorical baggage, as do so many elements of art that we may take for granted if we are not looking closely). We will be interested in the social roles of food, the way people behave in restaurants, dinner as a ritual, food and food-related behavior as indicators of class, meals as opportunities for people to come together in fellowship and conversation (or to fail to do so); in anxieties related to the issue of putting foreign substances into one’s body; and in questions of memory, of identity, of authenticity, of conscious awareness of the world and of other people.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Michael Ondaatje, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*. (Knopf, 2002).
2. *The Food and Film Reader* (Spring 2019). This will be available at Mr. Kopy in downtown Chico.

¹ This course was previously taught by Professor Dennis Rothermel. Some of the structure of the course, and some of the language of the syllabus, has been adapted from his syllabus.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Troy Jollimore earned his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1999. He grew up in Nova Scotia, Canada and as an undergraduate he attended the University of Kings College in Halifax. Before coming to CSU Chico he taught at Georgetown University and the University of California, Davis. He is the author of three philosophical books, including *Love's Vision* (Princeton, 2011) and *On Loyalty* (Routledge, 2012); his articles have appeared in several anthologies, including the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love* and the *Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*, and in journals including *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, and *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. He has also published three collections of poetry, and is currently writing a book about the philosophy of poetry. He loves going out to the movies (and watching them at home, but seeing them in the theater is better). He loves food, too.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Three short papers (3-5 pp. each)	30%	
2. Final exam.	20%	
3. Final paper (about 10 pages)	20%	
4. Class attendance, participation, and engagement (includes quizzes, etc.)	30%	(+ 5. extra credit)

All members of the class need to submit and pass three short papers, a final paper, and the final exam. The final paper and final exam must receive passing grades in order to pass the course.

1. The three short papers will address the films shown during the semester. See General Advice On Writing Papers, below. (In addition to this there will be Very Short Writing Assignments assigned from time to time.)

2. The final exam will focus upon the readings that will have been assigned and discussed during the semester, and on class discussions.

3. Instructions for the final paper will be distributed later in the semester.

4. Class attendance, participation, and engagement are very significant. You need to come to class regularly (**including the film viewings***) and show that you are paying attention, thinking about the subject matter of the course, and keeping up with the course materials. You can do this in a variety of ways: participating in class discussions, performing well on quizzes, completing the Very Short Writing Assignments that will be assigned from time to time, etc.

Important notes: (i) You must be present during the entire class period to get credit for attendance on that day; no showing up late or leaving early! Also, as per the instructor's cell phone policy, if a student is seen with a cell phone on a given day she will be marked as absent. Repeated offences will bring stricter penalties. **If you can't live without having your phone in your hand or on the desk in front of you at all times, then (1) you need to face the fact that you have a problem, and (2) this is not the course for you.**

(ii) **The Wednesday night film viewing (i.e. the lab section) is a required component of the class.** Staying home and watching the assigned movies on your own is not a substitute. If you don't show up regularly to watch the films on Wednesday night, your grade will suffer significantly—even if you have already seen the films in question, or plan to watch them on your own, etc. Again, **cell phones are not permitted during the film viewings.** They are distracting to me and to others. Turn them off and put them away. If I see you texting during the film, or on your cell phone in any other way, you will be asked to leave (and marked as 'absent' for that film).

* **Students who have a medical need for a cell phone** will of course be excused from this policy. However, I will need a doctor's note.

5. Extra Credit. During the semester I will accept up to two Extra Credit Essays from each student. If you choose to complete these, **the first must be completed by the end of Week Six, and the second by the end of Week Twelve.** (Like all written assignments, these will be submitted through a link on the Blackboard page.) ECEs should be single-spaced, and about two pages in length. Each ECE should concern a cultural event: paradigmatically, going to a movie or going out to eat (at a restaurant, a cultural festival, etc.) *Eating at home, or in the dining hall, does not count. Eating at Taco Bell does not count* (unless you can convince me that it does). *Watching a movie at home does not count* (unless you get prior permission and there is a reason—if you are dying to write about a particular film that is not showing in nearby theaters, I'll consider it. The more interesting the movie, the better your chances are that it will be approved.)

ECEs are graded on a scale of zero to four points, which will then be applied to your final score in the class (out of 100). The standards for ECEs are the same as for regular written work in the course (see below), and I am not averse to giving a single point, or no points at all, for lazy work. If it doesn't show thought or effort – if it doesn't impress me a little, and convince me that you actually had something to say, that you have been paying attention, that you are keeping up with course materials and really devoting a part of your mind to the matter of the course – the mere presence of words on paper is not going to earn much of a score. So if you are going to do an ECE (or two), make it worth your time—and get it to me by Friday, November 16, the last day of classes before Thanksgiving break.

General Advice on Writing Papers

General Requirements. Three short Writing Assignments are required for HUMN 281W: three to five pages each, approximately 750-1250 words. A minimum of three pages of type-written prose (at 250 words per page) is necessary for even the simplest exposition of ideas concerning any of the assigned topics. A three page paper is quite minimal; it is doubtful that such a short paper would be able to say enough to receive a top grade. Hopefully you will have more to say about the films you are writing about than can be contained in the limits of a three page paper! (Is it okay to go over the five page limit? Yes – if you have a lot to say, and the quality of the paper justifies its length. We can discuss that bridge if we come to it.)

All written work must be composed of complete, grammatically correct sentences. *Proper citation is essential.* Handwritten work is *not* acceptable (except on in-class quizzes, of course). Points will be lost for poor grammar, misspellings, improper use of punctuation, awkward phrasing, confusing organization, etc. You should also take care to express your ideas as clearly as possible, to show that you have carefully considered the readings you address, and to display clear, careful thinking about the issues. *Always proofread your work carefully* before submitting it.

General Objectives of the Paper Assignments: The assigned papers are primarily exercises in interpretation. Criticism, i.e., judgment and evaluation, is not the main issue here; we will not spend much of our limited class time discussing whether we liked the films or not (a certain amount of sharing enthusiasms is fine, but again, time is limited), and you should not spend *any* of the limited space available in your papers on this question. (Observations like “I really couldn’t get into this movie,” etc., are not to the point: they are about *you*, not about the movie, and are more or less just another way of saying “I don’t actually have anything to say about the movie, so I’ll just talk about my own feelings instead.”)

Films are interpretable objects: making a film is a way of saying something. (Though perhaps it is better to say: a way of saying many things simultaneously.) At the same time we must recognize that there is much room for disagreement, with respect to any film that is complex and interesting enough to be worth considering, about just *what* the filmmaker is trying to say. That room for disagreement is part of why our discussions will be interesting! (And why it is interesting to read the writings of intelligent film critics, etc.) To say this, of course, is not to say that anything goes; it is always possible to misunderstand a movie, and there are many interpretations that are unsupportable, and just wrong. (The Nazis are not the heroes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The death of the shark in *Jaws* represents a happy ending, not a tragic one. Darth Vader is not Luke Skywalker’s second cousin, twice removed. And so on.)

What is the formula for good writing? There is no formula for good writing. Good writing manifests and expresses creativity, intelligence, and craft, and none of these can be defined in a formula. Good critical writing is also clear, which is not to say that it is *simple*, but rather that it avoids unnecessary obscurity and ambiguity. Sometimes it is more useful to talk about what should be *avoided* in writing, i.e. what makes for bad writing: we could mention, here, lack of clarity, lack of focus, the use of clichés, typos, grammatical or syntactical errors, and above all **apparent laziness**: that is, the lack of evidence that the author has thought seriously about what she is writing about, and/or put serious effort into the writing itself.

At any rate, just as the fact that film interpretation is complex and there is room for disagreement does not imply that there is no such thing as an incorrect (or, for that matter, just plain dumb) interpretation of a film, the fact that there is no formula for good writing does not imply that there is no difference between good writing and bad writing. (Compare: there is no *formula* for being a good baseball player, but we can all tell when someone stinks: he’s slow, he strikes out, he drops the ball, etc.) The difference between good writing and bad is quite apparent. F

The articles by David Denby are pretty good models of strong writing about film, as are the selections from A.O. Scott’s book on criticism. (You will find the former in Week Two, the latter in Week Three.) Scott is the primary film reviewer for the New York Times, and if you google him you will find plenty of reviews he has written. Other good film reviewers currently at work include Anthony Lane, Manohla Dargis, and Dave Kehr; my personal favorite movie reviewer was Pauline Kael, who passed away some years back, and whose writing is immensely pleasurable but too brilliant to try to imitate.

Letter Grades and what they Mean:

Generally, *excellent* work displays genuine and original insight, observation and/or analysis. This will get you an A.

Very good work will have at least some of these virtues and will be competently written and presented, marred by a minimum of errors. This is *above average* work, and earns a B.

Satisfactory work, which falls into C range, achieves competence without exhibiting much in the way of original thought or substantial effort. C work shows a reasonable degree of comprehension of and familiarity with the course materials, and so is adequate for passing.

Anything below this falls into D or F territory.

A former colleague of mine used to put the following Grading Policy on his syllabi: *The better your work, the higher your grade.* At the end of the day, that's really what it comes down to.

Paper Submission

All papers will be due 5:00 PM on the relevant Friday. Papers will be submitted via the relevant link on the course Blackboard/Learn site. Please save your paper as a MS Word doc or a pdf and upload the attachment. **Do not use google docs.**

Please note: **Papers are due by the advertised due date and not accepted after that date. Late work will not be accepted.**

Helpful principles for watching and talking about movies (and other cultural artifacts)

1. *Pay attention.*
2. It's okay to be confused sometimes about what is going on. (But *pay attention.*)
3. Likewise, it's okay to be uncertain –even after you have finished watching the film – about what it all means. Indeed we should all be open to considering alternative interpretations (including those offered by our fellow human beings) and to changing, or expanding, our minds.
4. Remember that there does not have to be *one* meaning, or *one* reductive interpretation. (And we should avoid using language like, “What is *the point* of this movie?” A movie that has a single point is not a movie that is worth our time.)
5. Related to #4: use your imagination. Interpretation and criticism are *creative* processes. This does not mean that anything goes. (When people go badly wrong, it is usually because either (i) they are working with a form or genre they are inexperienced in, or (ii) they did not *pay attention.*) The point is that interpretation is not mechanical; there is no formula for it. It is, in its own way, as A.O. Scott points out, a way of making art.
6. Remember that the film is an art object made by other human beings. There are, presumably, reasons for the choices they have made. (And a film involves literally *thousands* of choices.) We communicate with the filmmaker(s) (the director, the screenwriter, etc.) by asking ourselves, why did they make *these* choices? Why did *this* happen, instead of that? Why does this room look like *this*? Why did they cut the shot *there*, instead of cutting it earlier or later? Why did they leave out this piece of information? Etc.)
6. Always be respectful of your conversation partners – even (or especially) when you disagree.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

The standards of academic honesty as set forth in the CSU, Chico University catalog and other relevant documents are to be conformed to. **Plagiarism, cheating on exams, and indeed any form of cheating will result in a failing grade for the course, and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs.**

Students should understand that plagiarism includes *any* uncredited use of another person's words, ideas, or intellectual work, or any attempt to claim as one's own the product of someone else's intellectual labor. This means that assignments must be written predominantly in your own words, and that any use of other people's words or ideas (including those of other students!) *must* be footnoted and cited. **It is each student's responsibility to ensure that she understands how to avoid plagiarism.** In the "Resources" folder you will find a document, "What is Plagiarism and Why Is It Important?" Read this document carefully, and see the instructor if you have any questions or are unclear on the matter.

STUDENTS WITH CERTIFIED DISABILITIES

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. Please note that you may be required to show documentation of your disability.

To receive such documentation or to gain assistance with reasonable accommodation in your classes, please contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) for coordination of your academic accommodations. The ARC is located in Student Services Center 170; their phone number is 530-898-5959 and their website is <http://www.csuchico.edu/arc>.

TITLE IX

State law makes university professors mandated reporters. This means I am required to report to the Title IX Coordinator whenever I learn about incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking that affect any member of the campus community. This includes disclosures that occur during our class discussions or in private. Students may make a **confidential** report to the Counseling and Wellness Center or Safe Place. Information on campus reporting obligations and other Title IX related resources are available here: www.csuchico.edu/title-ix.

OTHER CAMPUS RESOURCES

There are many resources available to students such as tutoring through the Student Learning Center, assistance with personal crises through the Counseling Center, help with research through the library, etc. Check out the "Student resources" tab on our Blackboard page for more information.

Food Pantry: The Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry provides supplemental food, quality meal access, CalFresh USDA SNAP food benefit application assistance and referrals for Chico State students. Stop by the Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry, Student Services 196 for supplemental food.

ADDING AND DROPPING

You are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. You should be aware of deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes, as the instructor is very reluctant to make exceptions to the general policies.

TRIBAL LANDS STATEMENT

For thousands of years the land that CSU, Chico occupies has been the traditional land of the Mechoopda people. Today, this land is still the home of many indigenous people. We are fortunate, and should be grateful, to have the opportunity to work here; and it would be a good thing if we were all to make an effort to learn more about the history of this place and of the various people who have occupied it.

STUDENT LEARNING CENTER

The mission of the Student Learning Center (SLC) is to provide services that will assist CSU, Chico students to become independent learners. The SLC prepares and supports students in their college course work by offering a variety of programs and resources to meet student needs. The SLC facilitates the academic transition and retention of students from high schools and community colleges by providing study strategy information, content subject tutoring, and supplemental instruction. The SLC is online at <http://www.csuchico.edu/slc>. The University Writing Center has been combined with the Student Learning Center.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

HUMN 281I, Food and Film – WI, incorporates the following General Education Student Learning Outcomes:

Written Communication: Demonstrates the ability to question, investigate and draw well-reasoned conclusions and to formulate ideas through effective written communication appropriate to the intended audience.

Critical Thinking: Identifies issues and problems raised in written texts, visual media and other forms of discourse, and assesses the relevance, adequacy and credibility of arguments and evidence used in reaching conclusions.

Active Inquiry: Demonstrates curiosity to ask questions, seek answers, contemplate, and pursue investigations with intellectual rigor, while making connections between cognitive and personal development.

Diversity: Demonstrates an understanding of and facility with different intellectual viewpoints as well as the unique perspectives of others based on varied experiences, identities and social attributes.

Creativity: Takes intellectual risks and applies novel approaches to varied domains.