

# ENGL 121B: Composition Social Issues (Food Politics)

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## Overview

This course attempts to encourage students to think of themselves as subjects that do not float in abstract space but rather are embodied, situated, and emplaced by way of engaging issues of food production, distribution, and consumption. As a medium that is often thought as transparent to and intimate with the body, food is in reality heavily invested with power relations and the forms of knowledge produced thereby. For example, what does Seattle's self-proclamation as a multicultural city use food as an important leverage in this rhetoric? How does this stand in relation to the massive gentrification and rising level of homelessness it has been undergoing, especially among its inhabitants of color? Seen in this light, food becomes less a simple object of consumption; rather, it becomes an interpretive window through which we come to know some things at the expense of others.

Consequently, asking students to think critically about how they engage with the many food products in their lives amounts to encouraging them to develop a self-reflexive habit adequate to our ever-shifting contemporary moment.

## Role of Service-Learning in the Course

I anticipate that students in my class will mostly interact with places of food distribution (food banks, soup kitchens, etc.). Being in these places in itself will give them not only a tangible context to the questions they will be dealing with in class but also a sense of the many complex ways food is entangled with the lives of people. Put in a different way, service learning will put students right at the heart of how food is more than just the act of eating—it also raises other questions: who gets to eat what? How is eating itself differently refracted among different populations? How is food deployed as a part of a larger political project?

## Assignments Related to Service-Learning

Students will complete two assignment sequences, each of which consists of two short assignments and one major projects. The short assignments will tend more towards the role of the student as an observer and a listener, requiring them to engage with their environment through rhetorical analyses or interviews, among other modes of listening. On the other hand, the major projects will put emphasis on their role as writers and producers. It is likely that they will take the form of a genre product appropriate to their environment or a collaborative ethnographic project, among other possibilities. All in all, my approach to creating assignments has always been to ask the students to treat themselves and their surroundings as sources of knowledge. Thus, I anticipate serving in these various places will provide them with ample opportunities to critically engage with their environments, in the capacity of either a writer or a listener.

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