**COMM 4379:**

**Culture,**

**Food,**

**And**

**Travel**

**Storytelling**



In recent years, food and travel writing has seen an explosion of writers whose contributions range from personal blog posts to food and travel guides on websites such as the Lonely Planet and Trip Advisor, among many others. Each writer brings his or her own flavor to their projects: some celebrate the sheer pleasure of traveling, eating, and experiencing a new location, while others explore the history and deeper cultural issues of the areas which they visit. In addition to the wide range of topics and publishing options, there is also an array of options of the type of content that is produced—from essays to photo guides to video, each has its own strength in conveying what the author wishes.

There are many reasons why this type of writing has increased in popularity. For one, traveling to new locations is easier today than at any point in history. The ease of travel and the reduction of many language barriers means that places that were previously challenging to get to or difficult to survive in if there are now accessible to outsiders. In addition to the ease of travel, it is also easier to create content and publish it online than ever before. From the increasing quality of technology like camera phones to the wide range of website creation tools, publishing your experiences while abroad is no longer just the domain of the professional.

At the same time, though, there is a vast difference between the amateur and the professional travel and food writer. In particular, the latter is able to produce not only quality content, but is able to provide context to the experiences. Whereas many amateur travelers go from popular location to popular location with the intent of seeing some of the most famous sites in the world, the professional understands that seeing is different from experiencing the local culture.

The purpose of this class is to train students to be professional travel and food content creators by giving them tools to understand both how to tell a story using today’s technologies and how to provide the context to what they are seeing, eating, and exploring. The location of this trip is intentional: Bologna, Italy. It is a town with incredible history, culture, and food. Far removed from the beaten path, it will allow you to truly engage with the local Italian culture and cuisine.

***COURSE OBJECTIVES***

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

* Discuss the foundations of and intersections among culture, history, food, and communication
* Understand the historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts which influence our relationships with food production and consumption, in particular in Italy although globally as well
* Explain how food, and its production and consumption, can act as communicative practice that can both shape and reflect larger social and cultural discourses
* Learn different communication tools and be able to create content related to travel, food, and culture using the most effective of those tools

**Book Readings**

These are to be completed before we depart.

*The Lonely Planet’s Guide to Travel Writing*

(<https://www.amazon.com/Travel-Writing-Lonely-Planet-George/dp/1743216882>)

*The Art of Travel*

(<https://www.amazon.com/Art-Travel-Alain-Botton/dp/0375725342>)

**Individual Website**

You will be responsible for an ongoing blog about your culinary and travel adventures. The blog is a chance for you to let the public, including your fellow classmates, know about your experiences in Italy. These should not strictly be written narratives, either, but include multimedia storytelling components we will learn in class. These should include images, videos, interactive maps, embedded links, etc. Your blogs will be set up prior to departure.

***EVALUATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF STUDENTS***

Students will be graded based upon the following requirements:

* Weekly Digital Assignments 40%
* Blog 10%
* Website Project Design 10%
* Active Participation 20%
* Final Project 20%

**MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS**: If you have mental health issues that may prevent you from meeting deadlines in this course, you need to have them documented with CSD or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS, www.caps.uh.edu) early in the semester. I do not need to know the nature of your concerns or issues, only that you have documented them with the university. This can help you prevent losing points later in the semester.

Let me stress: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps)](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let's Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.   
<http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html>

*I take mental health concerns seriously. College can be a stressful time. If at any time during the semester you are feeling depressed, anxious, suicidal, or anything else unusual, please come talk, email, or call me immediately.* ***I am here to help****.*

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE:** Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here: <http://www.uh.edu/legal-affairs/equal-opportunity/policies/title-IX/index.php>. Or, you can contact UH’s Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Richard Baker, at 713-743-8835 or [rabaker4@uh.edu](mailto:rabaker4@uh.edu). Other resources include: <http://knowyourix.org/>, <https://www.notalone.gov/>, and <http://endrapeoncampus.org/>. You can also approach me about any issue related to harassment or violence.

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**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND CLASSROOM CIVILITY:**

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class. In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical thinking, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. These differences enhance the learning experience and create an atmosphere where students and instructors alike are encouraged to think and learn. On sensitive and volatile topics, students may sometimes disagree not only with each other but also with me.

It is expected that we will respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions and that each individual will be treated with respect regardless of whether you agree with his/her viewpoints or not. Students who show disrespect in the classroom (i.e. interrupting other students and/or me, leaving the classroom unexcused, using disrespectful language, etc.) will be asked to leave the class permanently.

***Tentative Schedule***

Week One

June 1 (Saturday): Depart IAH

June 2 (Sunday): Arrive in Italy – Welcome Meal/Introduction to Bologna & Italy

June 3 – 7:

Topics include: multimedia training, orientation to Bologna and Italian culture, assignments getting students familiar with Bologna and the tools with which they can tell their stories.

Week Two

June 10-14

Topics include: exploring the region and learning the history of Italy. Day trips to: Modena, Verona, Ravenna, Milan, Venice to learn both the context of Italian culture and cuisine as well as to begin learning how to tell stories of the country in the most effective way possible.

Week Three

June 17-21

Topics include: further explorations of Italy, with trips to Tuscany, Florence, Siena, and Rome. By end of this week, students should have expertise at both content creation and content execution and a strong familiarity with Italy.

Week Four

June 24-30

June 24-25: Students work on their final project, which will be on a topic of their choice

June 26-27: Students will work with me to edit their final projects

June 28: Students present final project to groups

June 29: Final day in Bologna, farewell dinner

June 30: return to Houston