



First-Year Seminar Program | Fall 2008

Wheaton College
Norton, Massachusetts 02766

The Summer Assignment | The Book

Your preparation for college will begin over the summer with a reading and writing assignment that exemplifies the First-Year Seminar Program's emphasis on ideas that affect the human condition. This summer, all new first-year students will read *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), by Michael Pollan, who also wrote *The Botany of Desire* (2001).

The required book is available at many libraries and bookstores and at a discounted price from **The Old Town Hall Bookstore** at Wheaton College. To contact the bookstore, please call (508) 286-3430 or send an email to bookstore@wheatonma.edu.

The Summer Assignment | The Essay

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, author Michael Pollan states his objective in writing the book.

"My wager in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* was that the best way to answer the questions we face about what to eat was to go back to the very beginning, to follow the food chains that sustain us, all the way from the earth to the plate—to a small number of actual meals. I wanted to look at the getting and eating of food at its most fundamental, which is to say, a transaction between species in nature, eaters, and eaten...*What I try to do in this book is approach the dinner question as a naturalist might, using the long lenses of ecology and anthropology, as well as the shorter, more intimate lens of personal experience.*" (5-6)

As you read *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, take notes on what you think is the central argument, the assumptions on which the argument is based, and the evidence that substantiates Michael Pollan's argument. After reading the book and making your notes, write a **three-page, double-spaced essay** in response to **one** of the following questions.

1. Does Michael Pollan succeed in answering the questions we face about what to eat in a way that is persuasive to you? If so, identify and discuss where he uses the three lenses of ecology, anthropology, and personal experience to make his case. Please refer to at least one specific example for each of the three lenses (ecology, anthropology, personal experience), preferably those that were the most striking or compelling to you.
2. If you think that Michael Pollan did not succeed in answering the questions we face about what to eat in a way that persuaded you, identify and discuss where he was least convincing. Again, refer to at least three specific examples from *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

(OVER)

that you found strikingly unconvincing, and explain why they failed to do so. In concluding your essay, discuss whether "the more intimate lens" of *your personal experience* of food and eating confirms or denies Pollan's claims. Base your argument on a critical reading of the assigned texts. Remember that this is not an opinion

piece in which you only describe what you happen to think about a matter. Rather, we expect you to craft a careful argument in which:

- assumptions have been examined and made clear, and
- appropriate evidence is provided to substantiate your argument.

By no later than Friday, August 1, 2008 please email your completed essay to:

advising@wheatoncollege.edu

or send a hard copy of your completed essay to:

Wheaton College
Summer Assignment
Office of Advising and Co-Curricular Learning
26 East Main Street
Norton, MA 02766

We look forward to reading your thoughtful interpretation of the assigned question, and to discussing your work and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* with you during Orientation.

Yours truly,



Molly E. Smith
Provost



Hyun S. Kim
Associate Provost
Professor of Sociology

Nancy Kendrick
Associate Provost
Professor of Philosophy