

Notes for Brown Bag on SRP

Welcome to the first brown bag discussion for faculty volunteers for the SRP.

Thank you for participating in this program.

- Goals of the brown bag
- Exchange ideas about and reactions to the book Fast Food Nation
 - Compare thoughts on the management of the discussion groups
 - Share techniques to stimulate and sustain group discussion.
- Background about the SRP
 - Goals of the discussion sessions
 - Tactics: Issues and Questions for use in groups

SRP

Goals of SRP

- Set tone for academic career at LSU- Importance of books and ideas
- Demonstrate LSU's commitment to high standards for undergraduates
- Provide grist for year long intellectual discussion among undergraduates.
- Initiate faculty-student interactions
- Thanks for participating!

Selection of book

- by university wide faculty committee A&S, Ag, Library, etc.
- Based on readability, relevant and approachable content.

Logistics for Aug 20

- Refreshments from 8 AM in the PMAC green room. Please arrive by 9:30.
- Students will be assigned to your room at the Maravich Assembly Center
 - Each group will be at least 5 students- barring abysmal turnout.
 - Groups may reach 25 with good turnout.
- You should have your room assignment already. Check the red text in the memo from Holly Carruth.

Goals of group discussion

- Provide students with an opportunity to voice their opinions and react to ideas.
- Not - a test to determine who read the book (Slackers probably won't attend anyway.)
- But- encourage students to refer to the book for evidence, anecdotes, etc.
 - So I intend to:
 - take cues from the students about the interesting parts of the book
 - encourage students to talk to each other
 - steer the discussion back to the book if it gets too far from the text.

-- Thanks to CELT for the guide to facilitators, a useful general guide to discussion management.

Potential themes and questions for a discussion of *Fast Food Nation*

Discussions do not always generate spontaneously. Here are some approaches to the book which occurred to me as I read through it, along with some musings which go beyond the author's arguments. These may be useful discussion starters or stimulators. Check the SRP website for other ideas!

Fast food and Free markets

Why do people like to eat at fast food chains? (It is a "free" country.)

- Socialization from birth? When did you first eat fast food? Does it set your standards for what tastes "good?"
- Advertising? Do you remember fast food marketing from your childhood or is it subliminal? What about the relationship between education and fast food? What food choices are on this campus?
- Speed and Convenience- fast food emerges when people get cars- so they can eat in the car. What types of fast food do you eat in the car? (nuggets burgers fries)
What types of fast food do you NOT eat in the car? (Pizza, fried chicken, Tacos)

Beyond the book:

Is there a dislike for uncertainty inherent in economic transactions?

- People want to know what a store/restaurant will be like before they commit.
- This may be the logic behind many brands- they guarantee a certain level of quality.
- Would franchises work in an immobile society? (i.e. you always stayed in the same town.)
- How do "locals" know where to eat?
- If you are new to Baton Rouge- how will you decide where to eat tonight?

Changing the Fast Food Industry

Do you want to change the fast food industry? If so, what parts?

How can you change this industry?

- As a consumer? How do corporations respond to consumer demands?
E-Coli and mad cow publicity and tightened private beef inspections (at least for the large chains).

Subway and emphasis on relative healthiness of their sandwiches.

Recent trends in Happy meals /Kid's meals (Milk and juice choices, fruit vs. fry choices).

What is needed for consumers to exercise power? Information and choices?

How much does the average consumer know about a fast food chain?

- price? nutritional value of menu items? quality of working conditions?

- As a voter? Government policy affects many aspects of the industry such as;
Labor standards (Wages, benefits, and safety), immigration rules and enforcement, Food safety regulations, advertising techniques. Do the parties differ on these issues? What have you heard in this campaign about any of these issues?
- As a worker? Can you suggest improvements or implement them yourself? Is the choice unionization or quitting?
- As a plaintiff? Does the industry make people fat? Is it "liable" for the ill effects of obesity?

Why is fast food the “All-American” meal?

Is fast food “American”? Why are Macdonalds targets of overseas protest?

If fast food chains are “American,” why is that?

- Early adoption of automobile?
- Faster pace of lifestyles- less time to sit and eat? Is eating a social event or a necessity?
- “Entrepreneurship”? What were some of the characteristics of the founders of fast food chains? Did they have backgrounds in the food industry? Were they just lucky? Who financed their chains?

Beyond the book:

Might fast food exist in other forms in other places?

(Hot dog carts in Manhattan, crêpe and kebab stands in Paris?)

- Adapted to pedestrians, not cars
- Often not chains- is theirs a repeat business? Does branding not matter for crêpes?

Regional variation and the franchising of America

What is the author’s description of Colorado? Have you ever been there? Does the description fit? Given the description, would you like to live there?

Thinking beyond the book:

Is the description of the Front Range in Colorado (Pueblo to Fort Collins via boulder and Colorado Springs) generalizable to the rest of the USA? Is your hometown (becoming) a sprawl of identical chain stores and fast food outlets?

- Do you live in Metairie (two words- Veterans’ Boulevard) or Grand Isle (chain? what’s a chain?)

Why are some parts of the country more attractive to franchises?

Contrast Interstates and US highways.

Can all chains compete in all parts of the country? (Are there “Red Lobster” restaurants in Baton Rouge?)

Working in Fast Food

Have you worked in a fast food restaurant? If so- did the book match your experience?

What training was required?

What was turnover?

What were pay and benefits like?

Who was working? Who was managing?

Beyond the book:

If working conditions are do bad- why does anyone work there? What would these workers do without that industry?