In just a few short years, social-media tools like Twitter, YouTube, Foodspotting, and Yelp have revolutionized many ways we buy, sell, cook, eat, share, discuss, and learn about food. Social media is a key feature of the interactive Internet—often called Web 2.0. (DiNucci). It allows users to sift, shape, and share news and ideas in ways meaningful to themselves and others. Social media’s characterizing features are its ease of use; diffusion and functionality across technological platforms; asynchronicity; rapid and continued evolution; and ability to create and foster virtual and real communities.

In the language of the (inter)discipline of Food Studies, social media is a “technological fix” (in which scientific advances help ensure we can meet our future food needs) that enables an “anthropological fix” (in which we inculcate those advances, often seamlessly and rapidly, into our expectations, behaviors, and culture) (Belasco). These fixes are increasingly evident when it comes to social media and food. Social media has made possible mobile-food vending in areas (like Washington, D.C.) where it was previously difficult or illegal. It also facilitates other legal food transactions (i.e., helping draw customers to temporary pop-up restaurants) and even facilitates illicit food transactions (i.e., helping draw customers to underground restaurants, food black markets, and unlicensed street-food vendors). In effect, social media has led to the creation of an entirely new type of foodways in America, a phenomenon I call Foodways 2.0.

During the fall 2012 academic semester, I taught a class called Foodways 2.0, my first-ever college course, at American University. As an alumnus both of American University (where I
earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology) and Washington College of Law (where I earned a law degree), I was particularly happy to teach this course at AU.

Foodways 2.0 introduced sixteen upper-level undergraduate students whose studies are centered in a variety of disciplines to a host of scholarly, mainstream media, and online publications detailing both traditional foodways and the increasingly ubiquitous phenomenon of social media. The course provided students with an in-depth look at some of the most visible and popular examples of Foodways 2.0—including mobile food trucks, pop-up restaurants, underground restaurants, and underground food markets. It also focused on the underlying tensions that often exist between brick-and-mortar restaurants and Foodways 2.0 sellers and consumers, and some of the drawbacks of using social media to communicate about food. Finally, the class explored how food activists have employed social media to amplify their message in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago.

I asked students in the class to complete an original, independent research paper by the end of the semester that addressed at least two of the course learning objectives:

• Understand how social media has transformed an entire industry within a brief period of time, and has given rise to new segments within that industry;
• Understand the differences between traditional foodways and Foodways 2.0;
• Learn how social media can help empower consumers and businesses;
• Learn how social media can help facilitate food advocacy and activism;
• Comprehend some negative aspects of social media;
• Learn about the vital role immigrants and immigrant foods play in the development of new American culinary trends; and
• Understand how regulations impact businesses.
The four papers that appear in this issue of *Food, Media, and Culture* are those that not just best demonstrate mastery of the course learning objectives. They also evince a level of sophistication and inquiry that I believe is rare in undergraduate work.

In the first paper, *Food Fights and Internet Wars*, Juliana Crum writes about the ways social media has revolutionized food information and activism. Crum focuses on several evocative examples, including a controversy over ground beef known derisively as “pink slime,” the use of social media campaigns by the animal-rights group PETA, and a food-related campaign by the environmental group Greenpeace. In this latter example, as elsewhere, Crum discusses some of the repercussions and drawbacks of social media as it pertains to food advocacy.

In *Sandwiches with a Side of #Hashtags*, Nicole Federica describes various social media advocacy campaigns centered on food served in America’s public schools. Federica notes that social media has “profoundly altered the way in which people share information about food, particularly in schools.” More specifically, Federica discusses how controversies over the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s newly revised school lunch rules played out in the realm of social media. Federica examines how some social media campaigns by small numbers of impacted students—who may have seen themselves as powerless before the advent of social media—nevertheless helped forced the U.S.D.A. to revise its policies.

Melanie Löff-Bird, in her paper *From Tavern Talk to Pinterest Pins*, discusses how social media has reordered the manner in which Americans share knowledge about food. Löff-Bird traces early American foodways from the colonial tavern and into the mid- to late-1800s, when
community cookbooks became popular. She also discusses how even more recent advances like virtual and real communities that have arisen thanks to popular cooking websites have been supplanted by social media. Löff-Bird is critical of some of these changes—more sharing does not always beget more caring, she might say—but ends on a hopeful note.

Finally, in his paper *Food Trucks and Follies*, Shamar Walters describes and analyzes the ways social media has impacted the commercial operations and advocacy work of the vibrant Washington, D.C. food truck community. Food trucks operators in the District have increasingly drawn the attention of regulators and the ire of fixed-location restaurants simply because of their success, as Walters describes. One of Walters’s challenges in writing his paper was to demonstrate a lawyerly understanding not just of the existing web of regulations pertaining to the trucks in the District but also to track several ongoing, unique proposals by District regulators to overhaul those regulations.

I’m proud of the work done by Shamar, Melanie, Nicole, and Julie on their respective papers and throughout the semester. I suspect you will enjoy reading their papers as much as I have. I’m also grateful to all of the delightful students in my Foodways 2.0 class.

I am grateful, too, to AU Professor of History and Director of American Studies Katharina Vester for agreeing to let me teach Foodways 2.0, possibly the first course anywhere to explore the unique relationship between food and social media, during her sabbatical. I am also thankful to my fantastic co-editor on this issue of *Food, Media, and Culture*, Shana Klein.
I am indebted to the wonderful guest speakers who shared their ideas with Foodways 2.0 students during the semester. That list includes the authors of two of the books we read in the class, Professor Signe Rousseau in South Africa and Heather Shouse in Chicago, who spoke to the class in respective Skype video sessions. I am also grateful to the incredibly knowledgeable academics, lawyers, food truck advocates, and entrepreneurs who visited with the class in person during the semester.

Finally, I am grateful to AU School of Communications (SOC) Professor Leena Jayaswal, who lectured during a Foodways 2.0 class session about proper composition and framing when photographing food, a key component of Foodways 2.0. Professor Jayaswal also helped arrange for SOC photography students to capture the excellent images of the Foodways 2.0 students whose written work encompasses this issue of *Food, Media, and Culture*.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of *Food, Media, and Culture*. In the spirit of social media, I hope you won’t just share it with friends, classmates, and colleagues—but will also #FoodMediaCulture with the world around you.
WORKS CITED
