

Leigh Bush
**SLOW FOOD AND FAST FLOWS:
CHEFS, CUISINE, AND CONVERGENCE**

The simultaneous evolution of food celebrity and digital cultures has made current ethnography integral to illuminating how these production networks form and become interdependent. Although recent scholarship has begun to deconstruct and critique new food and media cultures, studies focusing on communication networks among food and media producers are still few. In this dissertation, I use ethnographic data from fieldwork gathered at the intersections of new media and food production sites across the U.S city of Chicago to argue that food and media ideologies at the professional and community level invoke fluid interpretations of authenticity that sometimes challenge and sometimes reinforce convergence culture, in which corporate and grassroots media, as well as the production and consumption of media, collide. As part of engaging with notions of authenticity, the simultaneous production and consumption of media—also known as prosumption—through storytelling has developed as a media skill and tool that has become crucial to individual, professional, and corporate social and economic success. However, despite arguments that new digital technologies and pervasive access have democratized mediation, I show how concrete and abstract barriers to entry make entering these fast flows of communication objectively and philosophically difficult for both food and media prosumers. I begin at a site of new media production, the Third Coast International Audio Festival, where media curators select short audio food documentaries and pair them with well-known Chicago chefs. I then follow one of these chefs to his restaurant where, as his assistant, I help him mediate as he seeks to grow his brand and business. Lastly, I take a position with a venture capital-funded software development company, Morsel Labs, LLC, (Morsel), working on a storytelling social media application for chefs.