HIST 215 Food in World History
Tuesday/Thursday 10:00 – 11:20, 101 LLCS

Description: This course introduces students to the history of food practices from ancient times to the present. It has no prerequisites and can be taken in lieu of a more general history survey or alongside one. The course is divided into two chronological halves, the first centered on the ancient and premodern world and the second on the modern world. Topics in the first half include the development of constellations of eating habits and culinary philosophies characteristic of major world religions and the long-distance transfer of foodstuffs and culinary philosophies through migration, conquest, and trade. The second half of the course covers such themes as the impact of food cultivation and harvesting on the environment, the industrialization of food systems, the rise of restaurants and fast food, and the relationship between cooking and eating and national, ethnic, class, and gender identities. Along the way, we will study several specific countries’ food cultures and the history of a few foods and drinks.

Learning objectives: By the end of the term, students should understand

- how foods and eating have been intertwined with religious beliefs and national, class, and gender identities
- how cultural interactions between peoples and regions have altered practices of food production, distribution, and consumption
- how the production, distribution, and consumption of food have shaped, and been shaped by the natural environment
- how modern societies have transformed eating practices

Students should also improve their ability to

- analyze primary sources in historical context
• carry out historical research
• synthesize their historical knowledge into an analytical narrative

**Global cultures requirement:** With its focus on religious underpinnings of food practices and culinary philosophies in the premodern world, this course meets the criterion of describing a worldview that differs substantially from those of the contemporary United States. As it moves to the modern period, the course explicitly addresses issues of gender, ethnicity, and class as factors in the production, marketing, and consumption of food, and encourages students to consider the role of food in identity formation along these same axes. Historically, food has often demarcated between cultural insiders and outsiders, even as foodstuffs, eating habits, and culinary philosophies have traveled across geographical and cultural boundaries. The study of food thus provides critical insight into the role of intercultural exchange in shaping world cultures.

**Grading:** Grades will be based on an in-class midterm, a final exam, two papers, unannounced in-class writing (four times, one long paragraph each; we will throw out the lowest grade), and participation in an assigned discussion group on Canvas. Exams will cover assigned readings and lectures and will have a strong essay component. The final exam will include an essay question connected to the discussion group project (see below).

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class writing</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cookbook quiz #1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Cookbook quiz #2</td>
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<td>Oral history paper</td>
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<td>Discussion group</td>
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**Grading policy:** This course adheres to the basic grading policy of the History Department. Thus, grades for submitted work can be understood as follows:

A+: Work of unusual distinction; awarded rarely.
A: Work that distinguishes itself by the excellence of its grasp of the material and the precision and insight of its argument, in addition to being well executed and reasonably free of errors.
B: Work that satisfies main criteria of the assignment, and demonstrates command of the material, but does not achieve the level of excellence that characterizes work of A quality.
C: Work that demonstrates a rudimentary grasp of the material and satisfies at least some of the assigned criteria reasonably well.
D: Work that demonstrates a poor grasp of the material and/or is executed with little regard for college standards, but which exhibits some engagement with the material.
This class has assignments centered on specific primary sources. The two **cookbook analyses** ask you to use one of the premodern cookbooks posted on Canvas to answer questions about the food culture of the historical setting in which it was written. There is an extra credit opportunity connected with this assignment. The **oral history paper** (week 10) asks you to consider the role of food in memory and identity by interviewing someone over the age of fifty for one or more memory of food or eating.

**Unannounced in-class writing.** Four times during the term, you will be asked to spend 10 minutes of class time writing a paragraph or two. These will be primarily based on the day’s reading. Make sure that you bring paper and a writing implement to class every day so as to be prepared for these written responses. I will drop the lowest grade. In-class writings will be graded on a simplified scale of 0, 70, 85, 95, 100, according to the following rubric:

0 – shows no evidence of having done the reading
70 – seems to have done the reading, but provides little or no detail; does a weak job of answering the question
85 – adequate answer. Answers the question and shows evidence of having done the reading. Could offer more concrete information or analyze the subject better, but basically decent.
95 – excellent answer, showing strong knowledge and analysis. Very informative.
100 – given rarely; demonstrates exceptional knowledge and analysis.

**Discussion groups:** This component of the class is designed to improve your research skills and your ability to work collaboratively on a research assignment. Immediately following the midterm, all students will be randomly divided into discussion groups on Canvas. The groups will focus on the history of beverages. We will have groups focused on coffee, chocolate (drinking chocolate, that is), tea, milk, water (drinking water), cola and soda, beer, wine, cider, and distilled spirits. You
will not be drinking the beverages. Your job is to research the history of your team's beverage and bring interesting information to the attention of the group, and also to discuss interesting questions about the history of your beverage. You must submit at least one substantial **informative post** a week for the three weeks of the project (weeks 7-9) with new information (minimum 300 words covering information not previously posted by anyone else – due 11:59 p.m. Tuesday), and you must also raise a new question about the history of your beverage, due together with your informative post. The second post, due by 11:59 p.m. Friday, is a **response post**: you must respond to a question raised by one of your fellow students (minimum 200 words).

**Sources and citations:** You may get your information from any reasonably reliable source, whether on line or in print. That includes Wikipedia, which can be an excellent starting point for research. You must, however, cite your sources in each post, including page numbers for published sources, and you may get credit for using a Wikipedia article no more than once. If you do not identify your sources, you will not get any credit for the post. Your grade on the discussion board will reflect the quality of your sources as well as the quality of your contribution. It is my expectation that you will seek out some scholarly publications in academic journals and university presses in addition to Internet sources. **For maximum points on your second and third informative posts, you must use this kind of academic publication (scholarly book or scholarly journal article).** We will discuss the evaluation of sources in class at the start of the project. Discussion groups will be actively guided by the professor and GEs.

**Grading:** The discussion group constitutes a major part of your total course grade (18%, or 6% for each week of the project). Each of the required posts will be graded on the following scale: 0, 70, 85, 100, where 0 = did not submit or failed to include a citation to your source; 70 = submitted a post that failed to meet the requirements in terms of length or content; 85 = satisfactory post; 100 = truly outstanding post in terms of length, content, and sources. As noted above, it will not be possible to get 100 on the second and third informative posts unless you seek out scholarly books or journal articles on your topic. You will be graded on the quality of your individual contributions, but there will also be a prize at the end of the term for the team that has the best discussion (evaluated both on the quality and quantity of information team members bring to the table and on the level of analysis demonstrated in discussion of questions).

The end result of this project will be for you to develop your own history of your team's beverage in the form of an essay on the final exam. You may not discuss how to frame your essay with your teammates, but you may (should!) draw on information posted by other members of the team. The essay must identify some key moments in the history of your beverage and it must include information from more than one country, so make sure that your group discussion has good coverage both geographically and chronologically. Your aim is to synthesize factual information into a coherent, analytically persuasive essay. You will be permitted to bring one 3”x5” notecard with notes to the final exam, so you should treat the posts as study materials.
Books available for purchase

Paul Freedman, ed., *Food: The History of Taste*
Katarzyna Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine*
Other readings are posted in the Modules section of Canvas.

Class schedule

Week 1. Food in ancient history


Week 2. Premodern dietary prohibitions and medical ideas


Thurs., Oct. 10: How to read a cookbook as a historical source. Exercise in preparation for the cookbook assignment. Time permitting, there will be a lecture on diet and health in premodern medical thought. Reading: Read the description of the cookbook assignment on Canvas and choose one of the cookbooks; begin reading the chapter on China in *Food*, 99-111.

Week 3. China and the Middle East.

Tues., Oct. 15: Cuisine, connoisseurship, and urban culture in China (focus on the Song and Ming dynasties). Reading: Finish the chapter on China, *Food*, 99-134.


Due Friday, Oct. 18, at 7:00 p.m.: Cookbook analysis #1 (on Canvas). This is set up as a quiz because that is how Canvas operates, but it is really more of an exercise, with several short essay questions. It is not timed, and you may go back into it as many times as you like before submitting. Your first task – which hopefully you did a week ago – is to choose one of the four cookbooks. The cookbooks are taken from cuisines that we are studying in this half of the course: ancient Rome, medieval Europe, medieval Baghdad, and 18th century China. I would suggest going into the quiz as soon as you have made your choice and looking through the questions. You should then read through the cookbook and take notes on it as we did with the “first American cookbook” in class on Oct. 10. When you go back into the quiz, make sure you write substantial answers – small essays – to any interpretive questions.
Week 4. Christian cuisines in the Middle Ages and long-distance food transfers

Tues., Oct. 22: Spices, tastes, and long-distance food trade in medieval Europe. Reading: Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices in the Medieval Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2008), 19-49 and 215-227 (Canvas); *Food*, 163-96. **Due in class on paper (optional): Cookbook extra credit.** This is your chance to earn 1.5 points that will be added to your final grade at the end of the term. In other words, if your final calculated grade is 86.4, it would go to 87.9, which rounds up to 88, a B+. To earn the extra credit, prepare a dish from one of the recipes in the cookbook you are using for your analyses. Describe the experience of preparing this dish in a paragraph or two. What were the challenges you faced? For example, did you have to make any substitutions, or use guesswork about quantities? How did you handle these challenges? How did it taste in the end? Please attach a picture of your dish to the written description.


**Due Friday, Oct. 25, at 7:00 p.m.: Cookbook analysis #2 (on Canvas).** This assignment asks you to compare the cookbook you selected with the chapter you read about that cuisine in the textbook. Aim for five paragraphs. In what ways does the cookbook illustrate the arguments made by the author of the textbook chapter? Try to write a thesis that both identifies aspects of the historian's argument as well as the aspects of the cookbook that you want to highlight, and then provide several paragraphs of argumentation and evidence.

Week 5. The “Columbian exchange,” continued: impact on Europe, Asia, and Africa

Tues., Oct. 29: The “Columbian exchange” continued: impact on Europe, Asia, and Africa. Reading: chapter 5 of Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (Canvas) This class period is going to involve small group discussions on a number of topics, so make especially sure to come prepared with your reading.

Thurs, Oct. 31: **Midterm exam.** Bring two green books (just in case).

Week 6. Industrialization of food and environmental degradation


Week 7. Modern food systems, continued; begin case study of Japan. **Begin discussion group research project.**

Tues., Nov. 12: Restaurants and public eateries. Reading: *Food*, 301-32. **First informative post about your beverage and first question** due 11:00 p.m. Tuesday (minimum 300 words).

Thurs., Nov. 14: The politics of culinary change in Japan, 1868-1930. Reading: *Modern Japanese Cuisine*, 7-115. **First response post** due no later than 11:00 p.m. Friday (min. 200 words).

Week 8. Food, nationalism, and globalization; Japan, continued. **Discussion group research project continues.**

Tues., Nov. 19: Food, hunger, and modern war. Reading: *Modern Japanese Cuisine*, 115-137. **Second informative post about your beverage and second question** due 11:00 p.m. Tuesday (min. 300 words).

Thurs., Nov. 21: Culinary impacts of affluence. Reading: *Modern Japanese Cuisine*, 138-199. **Second response post due** no later than 11:00 p.m. Friday (min. 200 words).

Week 9. Postwar food politics. **Discussion group research project continues.**

Tues., Nov. 26: Hog and Hominy: From “southern” to “soul” food. Guest lecturer Christopher Smith. Reading: chapters 4, 6, and 7 from Frederick Douglas Opie, *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* (Columbia University Press, 2010) (on Canvas). **Third post with information about your beverage and third question** due 11:00 p.m. Tuesday (min. 300 words).

Thurs., Nov. 28: Thanksgiving – no class. **Third response post due** 6:00 p.m. Monday, Dec. 2 (min. 200 words) (note different day and time from usual because of the Thanksgiving holiday).

Week 10. Food, identity, and the contemporary world.

Tues., Dec. 3: Fast food and globalization. Reading: research the history of a fast food chain of your choice.

Thurs., Dec. 5: **Oral history essay due** in class (on paper). Interview someone over the age of fifty about their food-related memories. Are there any foods that trigger memories of their childhood, or some other distinctive period in their life? Do they have any memories of first tasting some kind of food or drink? How does food relate to their sense of cultural identity? Write about the interview in an essay of roughly 1250 words. Note: this is not a free-form response piece, but a short analytical essay. You need to present an argument and supply evidence from
the interview to support your argument. One possibility for the argument is to identify ways that your interview subject illustrates a larger trend in food history. How do this person’s memories intersect with those broader changes? Another possibility is to identify a specific aspect of the person’s life experience, such as religion or poverty or living on a farm or an immigration experience, that explains their eating habits. You may also tell the person’s stories. Integrating stories, or narrative, into an argument is one of the critical challenges of history writing.


**Final exam, 8:00 Monday, Dec. 9.** Bring 2-3 green books. You may also bring in one 3”x 5” notecard with handwritten notes for the exam, which you will need to submit with your exam booklet. You may use both sides of the notecard. Make sure that your name is on the notecard.