

**Introduction to Food Studies:**  
**Food Matters!**

Environmental Studies 225  
Fall 2015  
Syllabus and Course Policy Statement

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**Course Description:**

Food is central to human life across the world and in all cultures. As biological nourishment it is, of course, vital for our survival as a species. It has also played a major role in our long and storied history as human beings, and it continues to be a fundamental element in the fabric of social, cultural and economic life both near and far. Yet, it is uncommon for us to see food as a topic of academic concern, worthy of close, analytical study. This course provides an introduction to the emerging interdisciplinary "field" of food studies and an introduction to the place of food in historical and contemporary settings. Using a comparative global perspective, we will explore the complex ways in which food has influenced human history and explore the roles food plays at present. We will examine large-scale patterns and as well as the more intimate ways we engage or experience food in our daily lives. We will address key questions such as: How has food influenced human history across globe? How was/is food produced? By whom? With what effects on the environment and society? How does food help create meaning and identity for people in different cultural contexts? Why do some people (continue to) struggle to get enough food, while others eat so much that it makes them sick? What does the future hold for our engagement with food? What roles can or should we play in the food realm going forward?

As a Social Science Group-Satisfying Course (>2) this class provides you with an opportunity integrate knowledge and skills relating to food's important place in the human experience. Drawing on scholarship in key disciplines including anthropology, history, and sociology, it provides a substantive and theoretical introduction to key food issues, perspectives and modes of analysis in the social sciences. It is designed to provide a foundation that will enable you to pursue further studies on related topics. Upon completion of the course you will appreciate how food is embedded within society and will be better prepared to understand your own connections to it.

As Multicultural-Satisfying International Cultures (IC) offering this course frames and examines food issues and concerns in an explicitly comparative fashion that highlights global dynamics and experiences. It explores how societies across the world have conceptualized and negotiated their relationships with food over time, from the era of the Spice Trade uniting Europe to Asia to current trends in national and transnational cuisines and food issues in Latin America and Africa. The first section of the course focuses on food in world history, while the second part focuses on the dynamics of the modern food system in the U.S. and a range of world contexts. By providing knowledge and insights into the variety of ways food

was/is experienced in international settings, the course provides you with a critical perspective on contemporary dynamics in the U.S.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course you will be able to:

- a) Articulate the key features of the "food studies" approach.
- b) Discuss and evaluate the important roles food has played in human history.
- c) Discuss and evaluate the most important ways in which food shapes contemporary life.
- d) Identify and appreciate the challenges and opportunities in our ongoing engagements with food.

In addition you will also have an increased the ability to:

- a) Critically analyze social scientific information, data and problems
- b) Interpret academic writing
- c) Synthesize diverse information sources
- d) Communicate effectively through written and oral communication

### **Course Format:**

This class integrates independent work with collective analysis. Key readings are assigned for each class period and should be completed prior to each meeting. Class sessions will involve a mixture of lecture and discussion. Guided by substantive outline slides, we will engage in intensive conversation about the material presented in each set of readings. You should be prepared to answer framing questions and offer comments on the themes and examples you encounter in the readings. On occasion we will view video clips to aid our explorations. In discussion sections you will analyze concepts and issues that relate to the lectures through an engagement timely "food studies" multimedia resources (blogs, videos, etc.). In terms of effort required: 1) you will be in class 4 hours a week for 10 weeks (40 hours); 2) you will read and synthesize course materials independently for approximately 4 hours a week for 10 weeks (40 hours); 3) you will work on "out of class" assignments for 2 hours each week (20 hours); and 4) you will review course materials for each exam and complete a final integrative and reflexive essay (20 hours).

### **Readings/Texts:**

Food in World History, Jeffrey Pilcher (2006)

This text focuses attention on the important role food has played in social, cultural and economic dynamics over time and across the world. Employing a globally comparative perspective, it offers us a way to better understand the similarities and differences between foodways and food systems in different times and places.

Food: The Key Concepts, Warren Belasco (2008)

This text introduces the "food studies" perspective and demonstrates how food-centered analysis contributes to our understanding social and cultural identity in wide range of global contexts. It also provides a substantive treatment of the development of the modern food system, revealing how developments and concerns in one world context are linked to patterns in other geographic and cultural settings.

Change Comes Dinner, Katherine Gustafson (2012)

This text provides an introduction to some of the creative ways in which everyday people are engaging and reforming the US food system.

The assigned reading materials are not of the typical, introductory textbook nature. Rather, due to the topical and interdisciplinary nature of the course, the readings in the first two sections of the course demand more from you in terms of engagement with content, concepts and theories. The first text is a rich

historical treatment and the second is a conceptually driven anthropological and sociological work. Your engagement with these materials will require more effort than with standard, introductory textbooks pitched at the freshmen level. The final text is a journalistic work and thus more readily accessible to a general reader. We will supplement these sources with additional readings drawn from decades of food related scholarship across a broad range of disciplines.

These texts are available at the Duckstore. We will supplement these sources with additional readings drawn from decades of food related scholarship across a broad range of disciplines.

**Requirements:**

Your performance in this course will be evaluated on the following components:

Exam 1: You will complete an essay style exam based on lectures, readings, films and discussions from the first part of the course. (35% of your grade)

Exam 2: You will complete an essay style exam based on lectures, readings, films and discussions from the second part of the course. (35% of your grade)

Final exam: You will complete an essay style exam based on lectures, readings, films and discussions from the final part of the course. (20% of your grade)

Out of class assignments: Each week, in preparation for your discussion section, you will complete an independent activity and produce a short reaction paper. For example, you will view a selected video or do a supplementary online reading. For each assignment you will write a brief (~200 word) response that you will turn in at the start of your section. No late assignments will be accepted. That said, we will drop the assignment with the lowest score. (10% of your grade)

Extra Credit: You may complete one or two of the assignment boxes included in the Belasco text for extra credit. You may participate in one or two of the "food studies in action" exercises the GTFs organize during the term. The GTFs will coordinate several of these events during the term. (Up to 5 points for each assignment (maximum of 3) will be added to lowest score on Exam 1 or 2). See the GTFs for more information.

Grades will be assigned using the percentages indicated above and a straight scale: 100-90 = A, 80-89 = B, etc. Plus and minus distinctions will be made.

**Policies:**

Missed Assignments

No make ups will be offered for scheduled exams or assignments EXCEPT in the case of a significant illness, injury, or family emergency. If you should run into one of these exceptional situations, you are required to notify me by email BEFORE the scheduled exam or assignment. We will discuss your situation and any possible accommodations that might be warranted.

Attendance and Participation

In order to engage the assigned material thoroughly you must be present in class. Also, I expect you to contribute to our discussions on a regular basis. Your comments need not be extensive – but they need to be relevant and informed.

Classroom Culture

In order to create and maintain a focused and productive learning environment we need to agree on some basic elements of classroom etiquette. Ideas for things to include or address?

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### Cheating and Academic Dishonesty

All assignments in this class are designed to assess your individual knowledge and understanding of the material covered/presented in the course. Thus, cheating or plagiarism -- in any form -- will not be tolerated. The work you present must be entirely your own. All individuals involved in an act of academic dishonesty will fail the course and will be reported to the proper University contacts as required. I do not expect to encounter any problems in this area, but feel you should be forewarned.

### Diversity and Equity

The University is a place where people from different cultures and experiences learn together; understanding and respecting these differences are critical for the University to be a place of open-minded inquiry where, in challenging the boundaries of knowledge, we include and value all members of our community. If you should ever feel that we are falling short on this goal, please let me know or contact the Office of the Vice President for Equity & Inclusion (1 Johnson Hall; Telephone: 541 346 3175; Email: vpinclusion@uoregon.edu).

### Accessible Education

If you have a condition that inhibits learning or evaluation under customary circumstances, please let me know. In addition, please request a letter from the Accessible Education Center (346-1155, 164 Oregon Hall) that verifies your disability and states the accommodations that I can make. I will make any reasonable adjustments necessary to improve your learning environment.

## **Class Outline and Schedule**

*(Subject to Change Based on Our Progress - Stay Abreast of Shifts)*

### Week One

Monday, 9/28: Syllabus and Introductions  
Wednesday, 9/30: Why Study Food? What Can a Food Perspective Do For Our Worldview? (Read Belasco Overview and p. 1-13)

### Week Two

Monday, 10/5: Food Through Time – The First World Cuisine (Read Pilcher p. 1-16)  
Wednesday, 10/7: Ingredients of Change – The Columbian Exchange, The Spice Trade and New Cuisines (Read Pilcher p. 17-49)

### Week Three

Monday, 10/12: Taste of Modernity – Global Economies and Food Moralities (Read: Pilcher p. 51-78)  
Wednesday, 10/14: Taste of Modernity/Global Palate – Empires and Migrations as Agents of Change (Read Pilcher p. 79-99)

### Week Four

Monday, 10/19: Global Palate – New Technologies and New Foodways (Read Pilcher p. 100-121)  
Wednesday, 10/21: Food in World History – Final Thoughts and Integrating Insights

Week Five

Monday, 10/26 \* **Exam 1** \*  
Wednesday, 10/28: Food and Identity I – Food and Cultural Diversity  
(Read Belasco, p. 15-34)

Week Six

Monday, 11/2: Food and Identity II – Food’s Role in Shaping Social Dynamics Across  
the World  
(Read Belasco, p. 35-53)  
Wednesday, 11/4: Convenience I – The Emergence of a Global Food System  
(Read Belasco, p. 55-69)

Week Seven

Monday, 11/9: Convenience II – The Uneven Costs of Cheap Food: Overseas and at  
Home (Read Belasco, p. 70-78)  
Wednesday, 11/11: Responsibility – Who Pays the Price? Global Inequities  
(Read Belasco, p. 79-103)

Week Eight

Monday, 11/16: Ways Forward – What’s In Store for the Planet and Its People?  
(Read Belasco, p. 105-123)  
Wednesday, 11/18: \* **Exam 2** \*

Week Nine

Monday, 11/23: Food Change at the Human Scale – Reactions to the Global Food System  
(Read Gustafson, p. 1-76)  
Wednesday, 11/25: (Re)Growing Food and Community I  
(Read Gustafson, p. 79-185)

Week Ten

Monday, 11/30: (Re)Growing Food and Community II  
(Read Gustafson p. 189-250)  
Wednesday, 12/2: Why Study Food – Reprise, What Does Food Tell Us About Our World  
(Read Gustafson p. 251-258)

**Final Exam: Take Home Essay due on Canvas by Tuesday, 12/8 at 2:45 pm.**