Food is of wide-ranging anthropological interest because, in eating, humans incorporate into our very bodies the products of nature transformed into culture. This course explores connections between what we eat and who we are through cross-cultural study of how personal identities and social groups are formed via food production, preparation, and consumption. Readings are organized around critical discussion of what makes “good” food good (e.g., tasty, healthy, authentic, ethical, etc.). A primary goal of the course is to provide students with theoretical and empirical tools to understand and evaluate food systems at local and global levels.

Classes will combine lecture and discussion. Each class is keyed to a set of readings, and it is crucial that students keep up with the readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. Some lectures will directly engage our readings while others will provide contextualizing historical and theoretical information. Occasionally we will break into small groups for more concentrated discussion. Class participation — regular attendance and participation in discussion — will count strongly towards the final grade.

Requirements:

Participation. You must attend class and participate in discussions. Short in-class written assignments and informal oral presentations may be asked of you throughout the semester. Attendance and participation will account for 20% of the final grade.

Short Written Assignments. You will complete 4 short written assignments during the semester. Three of these are described in the syllabus; the fourth will be a 1-1.5 page reader response to one of the week’s readings (not including those for 2/20) that you may complete at any time during the semester; nb: these are response papers, not summaries of the readings. These 4 assignments will each be worth 10% of your final grade. If you anticipate problems handing in work on time, contact me in advance; late written work is reduced by half a grade each day unless an extension has been granted 24 hours prior to due date.

Final Term Paper, combining library/online research and analysis, will give you an opportunity to explore in depth central themes of the course. 40% of final grade.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS:
introduction to food and culture: what’s the relationship?
Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1825) Aphorisms [handed out in class]

Aperitif
food paradoxes and dilemmas

MFK Fisher (1942) How to Distribute Your Virtue. In, How to Cook a Wolf.

view: BUFFET (with director, MIT Prof. Natasha Schüll)

written assignment: FOOD AND POWER DUE FEB. 20
Write a 2-page response to Chicken, informed by questions raised in readings for 2/13.

food and power


The Meal
WHAT MAKES GOOD FOOD GOOD?

good food tastes good


view: “John Cleese's Wine for the Confused” (excerpt, 28 min.)

food tasting: chocolate

3/5 good food is culturally authentic

there are a lot of readings for this week, I know; do your best, but feel free to read first the titles that most interest you.


view: PBS “The Meaning of Food” (short excerpt)
**Written Assignment:** FOOD MEMORY

Write a 2-page description of a food memory, preferably from your childhood. This could be a memory of tasting for the first time or liking/disliking a particular food, or it could be a memory focused on a particular eating event, collective or individual. Pay attention to as many senses as you can invoke to evoke this memory. DUE MARCH 12.

**3/12 good food reminds you of your mother (or homeland or childhood... or somewhere you've never been)**


MFK Fisher (1943) The Gastronomical Me, pp. 3-35.


view: clip from “Ratatouille”

**3/19 good food produces and maintains relationships**

*read 5 total articles:*


AND


OR


AND


OR


3/26 SPRING BREAK

4/2 good food is clean and pure

read 5 articles:


OR


Written Assignment: ITEMIZE and DECIPHER A MEAL, preferably one you’ve eaten in the previous week, offering a symbolic, structural reading akin to Mary Douglas’s. Discuss why this counts as a “meal.” This meal might be representative of your daily diet, or an exception to it. We are not being food police here, but rather doing symbolic analyses of empirical data. 2-3 pages. DUE April 9.

4/9 good food is good for you


FDA definition of “Milk”

AND ONE of the following:


4/16 good food is connected to the landscape

guest lecture by Juliette Rogers

read EITHER about the North American or the European “models“:

the North American model:


http://www.100milediet.org/

http://www.locavores.com/

Lunch with Alice Waters (NY Times video)


the European model:


Alison Leitch, Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity. Reprinted in FC, pp. 381-399.


food tasting: local goat cheese

4/23 good food is ethical


view (possibilities): Meat, Frederick Wiseman (excerpt)
The Meatrix
Black Gold

4/30 any food is good food if you’re hungry


Digestive

5/7 rethinking food “choice”


**Feast**

**5/14 POTLUCK AND PRESENTATIONS**

Bring to class a food item of significance to you (perhaps a nostalgia food, or an item from the meal you write about; or a Slow Food Ark suggestion, etc.). Be prepared to speak briefly about your offering to our feast.

Final Paper Due: DISSECT AND CRITICALLY EVALUATE A MEAL in political-economic, social, symbolic, and ethical terms. This will entail library/online research as well as analysis informed by course readings and discussions. You must engage and cite at least 4 readings from the semester. Preferably you will work with the meal you offered a structural analysis of previously in the semester. We will discuss how to approach this paper in class. You are strongly encouraged to speak with the Professor and/or TA about your progress on the paper. 10-12 pages.