



Study abroad.

SYLLABUS

FOOD AND CULTURE IN ITALY

Professor Geraldine Moreno

Contact Hrs: 45

Language of Instruction: English

SIENA, ITALY

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Food! What could be more basic to life than food? Food is the hub from which the complexities of culture can be studied. A marriage banquet, religious ceremonies, national and regional holidays, coffee breaks, a dinner with friends, all of these are examples of events in which food is the focus of meaning and groups gathering together. For humans, eating is not a simple biological act; food and nutritional status are influenced by the environment, social traditions, religious beliefs, gender roles, status and aesthetics, among other factors. Consequently a large part of the course menu is devoted to analyses of the social, environmental, and symbolic aspects of food and culture in Italy.

Many researchers and food writers regard Italy as one of the most important sources of most other Western cuisines. The cooking of Italy is considered to be one of the first fully developed cuisines in Europe. Drawing on influences from Asia early in Italian history, Italian cuisine eventually inspired French cuisine when Catherine de= Medici married the future King Henri II in 1533. Indeed *Larousse Gastronomique*, the major resource for French kitchens states: AlItalian cooking can be considered, for all the countries of Latin Europe, as a veritable mother cuisine. This Amother cuisine@, however, has also grown and changed over time as it has assimilated many products of the Americas as well as Europe and Asia. In this class we will explore the connection between food and society in Italy through culinary behavior and cuisine. The emphasis will be on the relationship between food and culture by examining how values and beliefs influence the way and the content of what people eat.

Ultimately the purpose of the course is twofold. First, it is designed to enhance the student's appreciation of Italy by experiencing the country and society through its culinary landscape- i.e. agricultural rhythms and practices, food used in festivals, diversity of regional cuisines as well as social, economic and political aspects of Italian eating habits and food ways. Second, the class will enable students to discover Italy through a variety of venues - markets, restaurants, farms, kitchens, cooking schools as well as in the classroom. Students will be encouraged to record their impressions and experiences through class assignments.

COURSE CONTENT

This class presents an integrated approach to the study of the relationships among food and culture. Human nutritional requirements are part of our biological inheritance, cultural considerations, however, shape our diet both in terms of what we define as food and how much of it we eat. Societies develop dietary patterns by making a choice among all the possible foods and cooking techniques in a given setting or environment. By no means does any one person eat everything; the mere fact that an item is edible does not mean it will be eaten. This course is organized around three main themes: 1) dietary geography and social history in Italy; 2) daily life and cuisine and 3) celebrations: tastes and

traditions. Within these contexts we will discuss such questions as:

- What factors in the environment of Italy have lead to certain dietary practices?
- How have Roman, Etruscan, Arab, Phoenician, Norman, Spanish and Austrian influences left imprints on modern Italian cultural and culinary traditions? Similarly, how has contact with the Americas influenced Italian culture and cuisine?
- What would contemporary Italian food be like without the tomato or corn (polenta)?
- What ritual foods reflect agriculture and religion as well as consecrate the event?
- How are rituals rooted in religion and nationalist origins punctuated and differentiated by food?
- How is modern Italian popular culture rediscovering and reviving regional cooking and Acucina povera?

This study of food and society will begin with a look to the history and geography of Italy. Using contemporary Italian eating patterns, cuisine and culinary behavior we will explore such issues as regional differences, the influence of introduced domesticates from the Americas, home cooking vs. haute cuisine and the rise in restaurants and the commercialization of food.

METHODS AND COURSE ORGANIZATION

This class will be a mixture of lectures, discussions and field excursions. Ideally the class will include excursions to local restaurants, markets, food preparation industry examples, food cottage industries, and farms. I will encourage students to explore local food ways as much as possible and they will be required to maintain a Food Journal throughout the quarter. This journal will serve not only as a means of recording their own personal food practices away from their customary eating domain, but it will also serve as an ethnographic tool for recording their observation of local diet and foodways.

Reading assignments will focus on two main texts: 1) The Tuscan Year (E. Romer) and 2) Around the Tuscan Table (C. Counihan). Additionally we will read from Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History (Capatti & Montanari). These texts will also provide an interesting discussion of emic (insider/ Capatti & Montanari) and etic (outsider/ Romer & Counihan) presentations of Italian culture and cuisine. The Tuscan Year is primarily a personal journal which highlights everyday life and culture through the seasons and food of the region. It will serve not only as an introduction to the culture but also as a model for student writing and journal assignments. In Around the Tuscan Table Counihan discusses how the family, and especially gender relations, have changed in Florence since the ending of World War II and examines current food practices today. Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History describes the cultural context of Italian food throughout history and provides insight into culinary customs, food lore, and cooking practices.

CLASS TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

PART I: FOOD AND CULTURE: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION: SPEAKING OF FOOD

What is the relationship between food and culture? Definition of basic terms: food, diet, foodways, culinary behavior, cuisine.

1. Romer: The Tuscan Year (begin reading)
2. Heldke, D.W. 1992 Recipes for Values. In Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food, D.W. Curtin and L.M. Heldke (eds). Indiana Univ. Press: Bloomington, pp.123-144
3. Capatti & Montanari: Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History: Chapter 2: The Italian Way of Eating.

WEEK 2: ITALIAN CUISINE

1. Counihan: Chapter 1 - Introduction: Food as Voice in Twentieth Century Florence
2. Counihan: Chapter 4 - Florentine Diet and Culture.
3. Capatti & Montanari: Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History: Chapter 3.

WEEK 3: FOOD IN HISTORY- PART I

Prehistory through the 18th Century; Revolutions at the Table/The Food Transitions. Food production systems: Foraging, horticulture, agriculture, intensive agriculture and industrial commercialization of food. The Dietary Transitions: Domestication, World Wide Distribution of Domesticates, New World and New Foods: Italian food before and after the tomato and cornmeal.

1. Counihan: Chapter 3: Historical Roots of Florentine Food, Family and Gender
2. Feldman C (2005) Roman Taste. *Food, Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*. 8:7-30.
3. Capatti & Montanari: Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History: Chapter 1 excerpt (pp. 1 -11)

WEEK 4 - 5: FOOD IN HISTORY, PART II.

Seventeenth Century to the Present-day Italy; development of national and international systems of food. The mass movement of food commodities. The development and rise of convenience foods, food additives, fast-food, nouvelle cuisine and "health food".

1. Capatti & Montanari: Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History: Chapter 1 excerpt (pp. 12 - 34)
2. Counihan: Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia. *Anth Quart.* 57: 47-59.

PART II: FOOD AND CULTURE: SOCIAL ASPECTS OF FOOD

WEEK 6 - 7: FOOD & THE FAMILY & THE COMMUNITY

Social Functions of Food: The symbolic meaning of food, food in religion and ritual, class, status and food, food as an expression of a community, food as a communicative system.

1. Counihan: Chapter 5 - Food Production, Reproduction, and Gender
Chapter 6 - Balancing Gender Differences
Chapter 8 - Parents and Children: Feeding and the Reproduction of Gender
Chapter 7 - Commensality, Family, and Community

Week 8 – 10 National Cuisines, Foodways and Popular Culture. The manipulation of food systems by restaurants and fast food chains, Cookbooks, folk narratives, commercialization of food, food colonialism.

1. Leitch A (2003) Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity. *Ethnos*. 68:437-462 [social identity; social movements; consumption; Europe; Italy].
2. Italy's restaurants, women rule the kitchen. *N.Y. Times* 142, Jan. 6
3. Parasecoli F (2003) Post-revolutionary Chowhounds: Food, Globalization, and the Italian Left *Gastronomica*, pp. 29-39 [history; politics; meaning; modern food system; Europe; Italy].
4. Petrini, C. 2001 Chapter 1. Appetite and Thought, pp 1 - 26. *Slow Food*. Columbia University Press: N.Y.
5. Heltosky, C. 2004 *Garlic and Oil: Food and Politics in Italy*.
6. *New Yorker Magazine*. From Italy: Guilt, politics and eros in a jar.

Week 11: Class presentation, Conclusion & Reflection

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Evaluation

The evaluation of students will be based upon participation in class discussion, quizzes, and papers and class presentation. Students will be required to do two types of writing: 1) essays on the reading material and 2) essays or journal entries based on excursions and class assignments. Evaluation of the essays and journal pieces will be based on the quality of the writing as well as content including such factors as perceptiveness about local customs, analytical abilities, observation abilities and methods of data/information collection. Midterm and final exams will not be given since these methods of evaluation are not appropriate to the nature of the course.

EXCURSIONS:

Many excursions are relevant to this topic and as indicated above it would be ideal to teach this course in conjunction with a cooking class or a series of cooking lessons. The most appropriate excursions to amplify the course material will be to local markets, small shops, restaurants and factories which abound in the region. It will be very appropriate to make similar trips to other areas in the country in order to compare availability of food items, local food systems and eating practices. It would also be appropriate to include trips which would provide a rural-urban contrast in food patterns, market systems and possibly restaurant styles.

Examples of excursions:

1. Food, Art and History

Italian art can serve as an excellent lens for viewing the changes which influenced the agriculture, cuisine and social history of the country. Students will be encouraged to study food in Italian art through planned and independent excursions to museums. Students will be asked to observe food as it is used as a subject or a backdrop in art and link it to historical events, cultural perceptions and Italian customs. (Examples: *The Fruit Vendor* Vincenzo Campi; *The Old Man of Artimino* Giovanna Garzona; *The Bean Eater* Annibale Carracci;

2. Agricultural settings: Vineyards, farms and orchards

The surrounding countryside will provide ample choices for excursions and walks which can be used to experience the variety of micro habitats that have been transformed by humans. Chianti, for example, is a region in which the landscape has been sculpted by history of agricultural change as well as social transformation.

3. Restaurants and eating establishments:

The wide variety of eateries found in Sienna and other regions will provide settings for class assignments. Not only will students be asked to record and observe differences in cuisine but also the behaviors, social interactions and rituals that accompany food consumption. I am also planning to include comparisons among a variety of restaurant styles such as Ahome@, Haute, fast food, and transnational.

A cooking class will be an optional event. The two classes could be integrated to include overlapping foci/material.

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4. Local markets/ shops:

Street markets

Bakeries:

Siena is famous for a variety of pastries/ sweets and different types of bread distinguish different regions as well as provide urban/rural and social class contrasts.

Shops:

A variety of shops are available in the city as well as throughout the country. Specific class assignments will be designed involving visits to these shops. They will serve as a lens to Italian culture - a way to view daily activities, ideas concerning food habits, seasonal patterns related to the diet, and elements of cuisine. They also serve as an excellent counterpoint to commercialized food systems, supermarkets and commoditization of food

and dietary practices. In other locales towns and cities sometimes have an abundance of one type of shop. This usually occurs in areas where a particular item is produced, especially if the product has become the basis of the economy or has gained a reputation for excellence (e.g. Norcia & Pienza)

5. Celebrations & Events:

A. **Slow Food** has numerous events and exhibits at different places in Italy. The calendar for 2008 – 2009 is not currently available however examples from 2007 include: Sept 2007: Bra, Italy-Milk in all shapes and sizes. Sixth edition of the International Exhibition of Quality Cheese www.cheese.slowfood.com; Oct 2007: Modena, Italy-A celebration of flavors that will involve the entire city in appreciation of balsamic vinegar, the regional specialty, as well as several of the foods this unique vinegar has enlivened over the years.

http://www.slowfood.com/img_sito/riviste/slow/EN/39/slow39.html

B. It would be ideal if students were able to experience some local celebrations. The choices will depend on the season in which the class is taught and the practicality of attending. The following is a brief list to provide some idea of possibilities:

Sant=ippolito Di Vernio - (March): chestnut-flour polenta and spaghetti

Easter Celebrations (April)

Feast of San Domenico- (May): the transformation of snakes into bread celebrated with a procession of breads shaped like snakes.

Saturnia- (May): a sagre celebration pecorino cheese.

Marta- (May): a festa featuring a procession of farmers and fishermen and their products.

6. National Museum of Pasta – weekend excursion

Located in Rome, this museum focuses on different stages of pasta making.