Nature of the course

What people eat, the way they cook, the ingredients they use, and the culinary traditions they follow vary greatly from place to place around the world. This course will explore those differences and examine the factors that shape them, including geographical differences in environment, population, culture, politics, economics, and history.

This is not a course about the geography of agriculture. It is not a course about the politics of food, social movements related to food, or the economics of food production. My goal is simply to introduce you to the wonderful diversity of foods people eat around the world and help you to understand why food traditions vary geographically. I also hope to cultivate in you a curiosity about food that will stimulate you to try new and unusual foods whenever you have a chance. Many of the foods we will talk about, though indigenous to places far from New Hampshire, are available nearby.

Organization and approach

The course will be organized geographically. For each of ten world regions, I will identify the distinguishing features of food in that region. I will explain the influences that have shaped what people there eat. I will discuss key ingredients to the cuisines of that region, representative dishes, and regional variations. Three classes will be devoted to special topics, considered globally. The emphasis in the course will be on common, everyday foods eaten by regular people. Material will be presented in a lecture format, but students are encouraged to ask questions and contribute.

A course such as this begs to be interactive. I want students to see, touch, smell, and taste the foods we consider. I plan to occasionally bring food to class. Students are also required to eat at an ethnic restaurant, visit an ethnic food store, and prepare a characteristic dish from one of the regions we talk about. We are limited in how interactive the class can be because of our location and the lack of available kitchen facilities on campus, but I want to do everything I can to help you experience the foods we discuss.

Assignments

Students are required to write three short essays. All of your essays must focus on a single regional cuisine from outside North America. You will be provided a list of cuisines for consideration, and are required to choose a cuisine and notify me of your choice by January 29. So that students will have a variety of experiences, each cuisine can be chosen by only one student, except by permission. I recommend that you choose a cuisine you know little about because you will learn more if you do.
**Assignment 1, Ethnic restaurant:** Eat at a restaurant that features your cuisine and write a 1,000-word essay about your experience. A list of ethnic restaurants in the region will be provided, though you can choose restaurants not on the list. If you choose a restaurant not on the list, your choice must be approved by the instructor. Before you visit the restaurant, read about the cuisine in sources listed in the library resources handout, cookbooks, and other sources.

When you visit the restaurant, read the menu closely and assess how representative it is of the cuisine based on your reading. Order at least one item for which a key ingredient is something you’ve never tasted. Take notes about your visit. Be curious. Ask questions. In your essay, describe your restaurant visit, discuss your impressions, identify what you ate, explain whether you liked it and why, and reflect on the overall experience. You should also discuss how each dish you ate fits within that particular cuisine and how they reflect the geography of food. Essays should balance discussion about your experience and what you learned in your reading that helped inform that experience. List all sources you consulted at the end of your essay using a widely accepted citation method. Write a word count for your essay on the last page. Due in class on Thursday, February 26.

**Assignment 2, Ethnic food store:** Visit an ethnic food store that specializes in your cuisine or the larger region in which it is located, and write a 1,000-word essay about your experience. A list of ethnic food stores in the region will be provided, though you can choose stores not on the list. If you choose a store not on the list, your choice must be approved by the instructor. Before you visit the store, read about the cuisine in publications listed in the library resources handout, cookbooks, and other sources. Spend 30-45 minutes in the store. Browse the shelves, looking in particular for ingredients that are important to your cuisine. Make notes about your visit and impressions. Ask store employees any questions you may have.

Choose one ingredient that is important to your cuisine, but about which you are unfamiliar and curious. Buy it, take it home, and examine it. Do whatever research is necessary to answer these questions: Where is the item produced? Is it most associated with a particular region? Has its production and use spread to other regions? How is it used and what role does it play in your cuisine? In what sorts of dishes is it included? What factors influence its geography? In your essay, describe your store visit, discuss your impressions of the store, identify the ingredient you chose to purchase, explain why you chose it, and summarize what you learned about it. Essays should balance discussion about your experience and what you learned in your research. List all sources you consulted at the end of your essay. Write a word count for your essay on the last page. Due in class on Thursday, April 2.

**Assignment 3, Characteristic dish:** Prepare a characteristic dish from your cuisine and write a 1,000-word essay about your experience making and eating it. Consult publications listed in the library resources handout, cookbooks, and other sources to identify possible dishes. Your choice and recipe must be approved by the instructor. You should seek the most authentic recipe possible, not simply the first one you find online.

Before preparing the dish, research its history, geography, and cultural significance. Make sure your sources are reliable. Don’t rely on websites unless they are produced by reputable individuals or organizations. What is the history behind the dish? Why is it associated with your cuisine? How does it reflect the geography of the place where it is eaten? What factors have influenced its development? What is its cultural significance? What does it tell us about the geography of food? As
you prepare the dish, keep notes on what you did, how it went, and any difficulties you encountered. When you eat it, make notes about how it tasted and whether you liked it.

In your essay, provide an introduction to the dish, summarize what you learned about its history, geography, and cultural significance, describe your experiences preparing it, and discuss how it tasted and whether you liked it. Essays should balance discussion about your experience and what you learned in your research. List all sources you consulted at the end of your essay. Write a word count for your essay on the last page. Due in class on Thursday, April 30.

**Working with a classmate:** You will likely have to travel and will need access to a kitchen to complete assignments for this course. If you don’t have a car or access to a kitchen, please inform me immediately. In such cases, I will allow students to team with a classmate who has a car or kitchen and do their assignments about the same cuisine, though the particulars of each assignment must be done independently. I will also allow students to team if they would prefer to work on their assignments with a classmate, but assignments must be carried out independently.

If you don’t have a car or kitchen and don’t want to work with another student, if you are unwilling to travel to complete assignments, or you are unable to spend small amounts of money to carry out the assignments, I would suggest you reconsider your enrollment in this course.

**Exams and grading**

There will be three exams, each covering roughly one-third of the course. The last exam will be given during the final exam period, but will not be comprehensive and will have the same format and length as the other exams. Exams will most likely include short answer and essay questions, and are intended to measure your general understanding of key course themes, patterns, and ideas. Students are required to bring an unmarked blue book to class on exam days.

Each of the exams will be worth 20 percent of your course grade, 60 percent total. Essays will be worth 13 percent each, 39 percent total. Students are also required to complete a personal information card that will be supplied on the first day of class and will earn the remaining one percent when they turn it in. Cards are due Thursday, January 29. Grading in a course such as this where grades are based entirely on written work is inherently subjective. I strive to be fair to all students and provide information on why I graded you as I did. Please keep in mind that grading is an assessment of quality, not a measure of effort. Please come see me if you have questions about your grades or would like to discuss concerns you have.

Final grades will be assigned based on the traditional scale in which an A represents work of exceptional quality (90 percent or better), a B is considered good (80-89 percent), a C is satisfactory (70-79 percent), a D is poor (60-69 percent), and an F is unsatisfactory (below 60 percent). Plus grades will be awarded to any student in the B, C, or D ranges whose semester average is within two percentage points of the minimum score for the next highest letter grade. Minus grades will be awarded to any student in the A, B, C, or D ranges whose semester average is within two percentage points of the next lowest letter grade. No extra credit is available.
Attendance, missed exams, late assignments

Attendance will not be taken, but students are responsible for obtaining notes from classmates for any classes missed. I will not provide notes to individual students (that would be unfair to other students), nor do I post the text portion of my PowerPoint slides online (because they are an unsatisfactory substitute for notes and that would encourage poor attendance). Students are responsible for obtaining information about any announcements made during class periods they miss. Final grades may be lowered for students who are absent excessively.

Makeup exams will rarely be permitted and will only be considered when circumstances beyond a student’s control prevent them from taking the exam during the scheduled time. If you think you have a legitimate excuse, you must notify me by e-mail or telephone before the exam begins, or, when that is logistically impossible, very soon afterward on the same day. You must also be able to prove your excuse in writing. Conflicts with jobs, other classes, and your personal life are not satisfactory excuses. Exams cannot be taken early for any reason.

Any assignment turned in after the due date will be docked one letter grade for each school day it is late. Lateness will be excused only when circumstances beyond a student’s control prevent them from submitting an assignment on time, the student notifies the instructor before the assignment is due, and can prove their excuse.

Textbook

There is no textbook for this course. Spend the money you would normally spend on a textbook on your assignments. Spend the time you would normally devote to reading the textbook to reading about your cuisine.

A bibliography of sources about the geography of food available from the UNH library will be provided. Three key titles have been placed on reserve to make sure they are accessible to all students. Other key titles are reference books that cannot be checked out. If you use a reference book from the list, please return it to the shelf when finished so other students can access it.

Blackboard

The university’s Blackboard computer system (http://blackboard.unh.edu/) will serve as an archive for course materials, will provide students access to their grades, and may be used as a method for distributing information between class meetings. I will assume that the e-mail address linked to your Blackboard account is your primary e-mail address and that you check it regularly.

Academic honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be severely punished when discovered. I will review the university’s plagiarism policy in class and will provide examples of behavior that would be considered violations of that policy. You must submit an electronic version of each of your assignments to Safe Assign on Blackboard so they can be checked for plagiarism. If you have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, ask me or see UNH’s Students Rights, Rules and Responsibilities handbook, available at http://unh.edu/vpsas/sites/unh.edu.vpsas/files/media/srrr1415.pdf.
Academic assistance

UNH’s Center for Academic Resources (201 Smith Hall; 862-3698; http://www.cfar.unh.edu/) offers study skills assistance, help with computer applications, drop-in tutoring, and other resources to help undergraduates fulfill their academic potential.

Connors Writing Center (329 Dimond Library; 862-3272; http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/) provides students assistance with any kind of writing and offers individual writing conferences. Center staff can help you understand assignments, develop topics, create research plans, organize your work, improve clarity, and learn grammar, punctuation, and formal writing conventions.

Students with disabilities

The University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you must register with Disability Services for Students (http://www.unh.edu/disabilityservices/). Contact DSS at 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you have received accommodation letters for this course from DSS, please provide me with that information privately in my office so that we can review those accommodations.

Tentative schedule

January 20-22: Introduction

January 27-29: North America

January 29: Information card due
January 29: Deadline for approval of cuisine choice

February 3-5: Latin America

February 10: Special topic – chile peppers

February 12-17: Caribbean

February 19: Exam 1

February 24: Sub-Saharan Africa

February 26-March 3: Middle East

February 26: Restaurant essay due

March 5-12: Europe

March 16-20: Spring break; no classes
March 24: Special topic – bread

March 26: Instructor in Texas; no class

March 31- April 2: Russian Domain and Central Asia
  April 2: Ethnic food store essay due

April 2: Exam 2

April 7: Exam 2

April 9-14: South Asia

April 16-21: East Asia

April 23: Special topic – breakfast

April 28-30: Southeast Asia and Oceania
  April 30: Characteristic dish essay due

May 11: Exam 3, 1-2:30