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 geographic differences in environment, 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 or the economics of food production. Rather, the course is intended 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 and explain the influences that have shaped what people there eat. I will discuss key ingredients to the cuisines of the 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, 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 Tuesday, February 2. So that students will have a variety of experiences, each cuisine can be chosen by only one student. I recommend that you choose a cuisine you know little about because you will learn more than if you study a cuisine you already know and the process will be more of an adventure.
Before doing any of the assignments, you must read about your cuisine in books listed in the library resources guide distributed in class, cookbooks, and other sources. At minimum, you should read about your cuisine in (1) Martha Rose Shulman’s *Foodlover’s Atlas of the World*, (2) *Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia*, (3) Michael Nenes’ *International Cuisine*, and (4) selectively in the book that covers your cuisine in the *Food Culture Around the World* series. After doing the basic work for each assignment, you should go back to your sources to help you better understand your experience.

You may also need to do additional research to carry out the assignments. If you do research on the web, be careful about any sources you use. Make sure they are written by people who are knowledgeable about your cuisine. There is a huge volume of material about food on the web, but most of it is written by people with no particular expertise about the cuisines they write about and should not be used for a course such as this. If you cannot justify why a web source should be trusted, don’t use it! Students who cite web sources that do not appear reputable will be graded down on their essays. If you have questions about whether a source should be trusted, ask me.

A sample of student essays from previous semesters that were done well will be made available on Blackboard.

**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. 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. Take photos, if possible.

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. Include photos if they help you convey what your experience was like. 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 18.

**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 a store not on the list if approved by the instructor. 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. Take photos, if possible. 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. Include photos if helpful. 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 Tuesday, March 29.

**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 dish 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. The best sources for authentic recipes will be cookbooks written by recognized experts about a cuisine and others who have a personal connection to a place and its food.

Before preparing the dish, research its history, geography, and cultural significance. Make sure your sources are reputable. What is the history behind the dish? Why is it associated with your cuisine? 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. Take photos, if possible. 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 experience preparing it, and discuss how it tasted and whether you liked it. Include photos if they will improve your essay. 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 Tuesday, April 26.

**Access to car and kitchen:** 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. Students without a car may want to choose a cuisine for which there are restaurants and stores located near UNH, or they can travel to Boston by bus or train. I will also allow students without a car or kitchen to team with a classmate who does and do their assignments about the same cuisine, though the particulars of each assignment must be done 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 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 Tuesday, February 2. 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 suggestions on how you can improve your performance.

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 an 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, readings, bibliography

There is no required textbook for this course. Spend the money you would normally spend on a textbook on your assignments.

Students are expected to read short essays about food in particular regions and countries taken from the following book (the book is, unfortunately out of print, though inexpensive used copies are available from Amazon):

The readings are intended to supplement what we do in class and are not a satisfactory substitute for attending. They do not cover much of what will be covered in lecture. The specific readings are listed in the course schedule. They will be posted on Blackboard in Adobe Acrobat format.

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. 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/srrr1516.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/). If you have questions about this process, please contact DSS at 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you are registered with DSS, and eligible for accommodations that you would like to utilize in this course, please forward that information to me in a timely manner so that we can meet privately in my office to review those accommodations.
Tentative schedule

January 26-28: Introduction

February 2-4: North America

February 2: Deadline for approval of cuisine choice
February 2: Information card due

February 9-11: Latin America


February 16: Special topic – chili peppers

February 18-23: Caribbean

February 18: Restaurant essay due


February 25: Exam 1

March 1-3: Sub-Saharan Africa


March 8-10: Middle East


March 14-18: Spring break; no classes

March 22-29: Europe

March 29: Ethnic food store essay due


March 31: Special topic – bread around the world

April 5-7: Russian Domain and Central Asia

Read: Shulman, “Russia and Eastern Europe” and “Central Asia and the Caucasus,” The Foodlover’s Atlas of the World, 26-33, 156-63.
April 12: Exam 2

April 14-19: South Asia


April 21-26: East Asia

April 26: Characteristic dish essay due


April 28: Special topic – geography of breakfast

May 3-5: Southeast Asia and Oceania


May 17: Exam 3, 1-2:30