CU 351 FOOD AS AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURE
IES Abroad Barcelona

DESCRIPTION: There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk.
M.F.K. Fischer, *The Gastronomical Me*

As culinary historian Massimo Montanari argues, everything that has to do with food – from the choices made by primitive hunters and gatherers to contemporary habits of consumption – represents a cultural act. In this sense, we understand that Spanish cuisine is not just about nutrition, but also about traditions that have developed over a long period of time and span the country’s political, cultural, and social formation. This interdisciplinary course combines the fields of food studies, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and contemporary history. We will examine the food traditions that unite Spain, as well as those that are distinctive of regional differences. We will also examine how globalization affects food culture and regional/national food identity, based on the assumption that the concept of (personal, cultural, regional, national) identity is strongly linked to food. We will focus on the evolution of local traditions and the recent boom of Spanish haute cuisine around the world. Current Spanish cuisine (for example, the coronation of chef Ferran Adrià, by the *New York Times, Time* magazine and *Le Monde* in 2004) is an excellent vehicle for exploring the complex relations between local and global culture.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:
Class discussion: The course is largely discussion-based. Students are expected to come to class prepared (i.e. not only having done the readings but also having considered them in depth) and participate actively in the discussions. Many of the readings discuss case studies of other places, which we will use as models for the Spanish case, as well as for their pertinent theoretical issues.
Field studies: In addition to the lectures and discussions in which we will cover the major academic themes of the course, the course also has fieldwork, with activities such as field studies to restaurants, to local markets, and anthropological exercises based on students’ field observations.
Class presentations: Students will present in class a “regional menu” that they deem representative for the area of their choice. The areas are the following: Basque Country, Asturias, Galicia, Andalucía and Catalunya.
Lectures: The professor will provide the main theoretical background of the course through lectures.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:
1. **Food preferences** (20%): write a *food journal for 7 days* on what you eat since you arrived. What do you eat: for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks? What would you eat if you were in the US? Do you eat the same kind of food in Barcelona than what you would eat on a similar occasion in your college in the US (i.e., pizza for a party night)? Do you buy food and then cook it? Do you check the labels? Do you always/sometimes/hardly ever/never eat in fast-food joints and restaurants? Do you eat on the go, standing-up, or while typing away? Does your home-stay mother expect you to sit down and have a proper meal? How do you feel? If live in your own apartment, how are your eating habits different or similar to those you have in the U.S.? The more details you record about your eating habits, the better. Do not forget, however, that food is associated with pleasure as well, so the feelings generated upon ingesting that food are definitely a must for the journal to be rich and useful to your own analysis—if you strictly record what you ate and where and with whom your notes won’t help you much for the second part of the project.

Once you’ve finished writing your journal, reflect on your preferences based on your journal writing; write an **argumentative essay** (3 pages). Considering the following: Are there any patterns in your diet? What was the last ‘new’ food you ate? What was your favorite food as a child and why? And, now? Have your tastes buds been disturbed since
you’ve arrived to Barcelona? What is something you thought you’d never eaten before and you have since you’ve been here? If it is true that we are what we eat, then who are you based on what you’ve eaten the last ten days?

**Journal must be turned in**, though nothing that is revealed in the journal will be made public in the classroom discussion, as you will receive comments on it.

2. **Midterm (20%)**

3. **Activity to choose between the following two (20%):**
   a. **Service Ethnography:** volunteer 5 hours at local food bank or soup kitchen and conduct participant-observation on how and why food is distributed. Write an ethnographic journal about the experience responding some of these (though not solely) questions: Who goes there? Do the people go alone or in groups? What are their stories? Who helps? Is it a state service or an individual or neighborhood’s initiative? What are the social dynamics of this place? Is it charity? Do they socialize when present or is this “just business”?

   Once the ethnographic journal is finished, write an argumentative essay (3 pages) based on your ethnographic journal responding to the readings on the politics of hunger. Food and hunger are inseparable from one another. Not thinking about the next meal, marks a sense of wealth, ease, privilege; thinking about it, instead, denotes poverty. How do we think about food? How do we assign it importance? How do we value food?

   **Ethnographic journal must be turned in**, though nothing that is revealed in the journal will be made public in the classroom discussion, as it will be graded.

   b. **Farm Activity Reflection Paper:** Attend the farm activity, (scheduled as a Friday course-relate trip), and conduct participant-observation on how and why organic food is grown and distributed in the Barcelona region. Based on your journal, write an argumentative reflection essay about the experience responding some of these (though not solely) questions: Who works there? Who do they sell to? What are their challenges? What are their stories? Who helps? What are the social dynamics of this place? Do they socialize when present or is this “just business”? How is globalization affecting the small, family-run organic farm? Write an argumentative essay (3 pages) based on your ethnographic journal responding to the readings and class discussions. How do we think about food? How do we assign it importance? How do we value food?

4. **Filming a Menu (20%):** Learn about the community of your choice Basque Country, Asturias, Galicia, Andalucía or Catalunya and create a menu. Investigate: climate, culture, traditions, worldviews and festivities to decide what is the occasion for the menu? How do you think it would be most appropriate to cook it? What would you cook? How would you present it? What would you serve to drink? This will be an in-class presentation.

5. **Class participation (20%):** insights and comments about course readings, responsiveness to classmates’ contributions.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Explain how food is an important vehicle of cultural manifestations;
- Relate food to identity;
- Analyze how different cultures celebrate food through rituals and traditions;
- Differentiate judgment values and comparison;
- Interpret aspects of local culture that relate to food, from its cultivation to preparation to consumption;
- Analyze and compare recipes, customs, and lifestyles;
- Demonstrate writing skills and critical thinking;
- Appreciate the Mediterranean diet and its diversity.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Attendance is mandatory for all IES Abroad classes, including course-related trips. Any exams, tests, presentations, or other work missed due to student absences can only be rescheduled in cases of documented medical or family emergencies. If a student misses more than three classes in any course 3 percentage points will be deducted from the final grade for every additional absence. Seven absences in any course will result in a failing grade.
## Session 1

**Course introduction. Food as Social Marker.**


## Session 2

**Writing Ethnography: How does one conduct a Participant-Observation?**


## Session 3

**What is the Relationship between Food and Culture? How we Eat? What’s Normal? What isn’t?**

- Course Related Trip 1: Soup Kitchen or Food Bank Service begins...
- Recommended watch: *Good-bye Lenin!* (2003) by Wolfgang Becker

## Session 4

**Food, Taste, Memory, History & Meaning. Individual and Social Food Memories. Sense Memory.**


## Session 5

**Boundaries, Traditions, Prohibitions & Taboos.**


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REQUIRED READINGS:

- Harris, Marvin. 1997. “The Abominable Pig.” In Caroline Counihan and Penny van Esterik eds. Food and

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Brillat-Savarin, Jean Anthelme. *The Physiology of Taste*.
- Gray, Patience. *Honey from a Weed: Feasting and Fasting in Tuscany, Catalonia, the Cyclades, and...*
- McWilliams, M. *Food Around the World: A Cultural Perspective*, 2006
- Vázquez Montalban, La cocina del mestizaje, ---, Saber o no saber. Manual imprescindible de la cultura gastronómica.

**RECOMMENDED FILMS:**

There are two types of food films: denunciation films and films on the pleasure of food.

Denunciation films or documentaries:
*Corner Store* (2010) by Katherine Bruens
*Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead*
*Food Matters* (2008) James Colquhoun
*Food, Inc.* (2008) by Robert Kenner
*Forks over Knives* (2011) Lee Fulkerson
*Hungry for Change* (2012) James Colquhoun
*Our Daily Bread* (2005) by Nikolaus Geyrhalter
*People Like Us: Social Class in America* (PBS)
*Percebeiros* de Fernando Ureña
Super Size Me (2004) by Morgan Spurlock
Vegucated (2011) Marisa Miller Wofson
Weight of the Nation: Confronting America’s Obesity Epidemic (2012) by HBO

Films or documentaries on the pleasure of food:
18 comidas (2010) by Jorge Coira
Babette’s Feast (1987) by Gabriel Axel
Bella Martha (2007) by Sandra Nettelbeck
Chicken Rice War (2000) by Chee Kong Cheah
Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (1994) by Ang Lee
El Bulli: Cooking in progress (2011) by Gereon Wetzel
Fried Green Tomatoes (1991) by Jon Avnet
Good-bye Lenin! (2003) by Wolfgang Becker
Jiro Dreams of Shushi (2011) by David Gelb
Julie & Julia (2009) by Nora Ephron
Like Water for Chocolate (1992) by Alfonso Arau
Moonstruck (1987) by Norman Jewison
Soul Food (1997) by George Tillman Jr.
Soylent Green (1975) Richard Fleischer
Ushpizin (2004) by Giddi Dar
Tapas (2005) by José Corbacho
Tetra about elBulli
Toast (2010) by S.J. Clarkson
Transfiguració about Nandu Jubany