



ANTH/SOC/FSST 375 Anthropology of Food and Eating: Understanding Self and Others

Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 2026

Instructor: Clelia Viecegli, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Office Hours: See Moodle for times and sign-up

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: USD\$110

Course Description

This course will address food-related issues from an anthropological perspective. It will examine the role that food plays in shaping: group and personal identities; ethnic affiliations in a global world; religious boundaries through rituals, taboos, and avoidances; and revitalization of local and global communities. Through reading assignments, and ethnographic research in the city of Perugia, students will explore how food traditions and local food are maintained and transformed over time and space, and how culinary knowledge is used to mark cultural belonging and differences. The course will focus on food as cultural heritage through an analysis of culinary tourism, the culture of restaurants, and processes of patrimonialization. Furthermore, it will apply gendered perspectives on the body and analyze power dynamics in Italian families through food consumption and preparation. Students will study food as a site of cultural transmission but also of dissent and resistance. The course incorporates a short ethnographic project on restaurants and cultural heritage. Through these exercises in qualitative research, students will become engaged in original research in and out the classroom.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *identify* the connections between contemporary Umbrian, Italian, and global food cultures through the examination of the food practices of individuals and communities (Weekly Quiz; Field Notes Journal; Final Exam);
- *recognize* the environmental, sociocultural, and economic factors that affect food supplies, food security, and health (Weekly Quiz);
- *design* an appropriate, ethical ethnographic project and—working directly with local partners who are actively involved in various aspects of the food system (production, distribution, consumption)—collect data on how individual food behaviors are shaped by their society's foodways (Field notes Journal; Presentation on “Food and Identity: A Personal Heritage”);
- *carry out* that project while approaching cultural differences with an unbiased framework (Field notes Journal; Final Exam);
- *communicate* their research about various aspects of contemporary food systems using twenty-first century tools while practicing systematic, ethical, and public-facing scholarship (Recipe Presentation on “Food and Identity: A Personal Heritage”).

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Office Hours	5%
Biweekly Moodle Quizzes	15%
Field notes journal 1	10%
Field notes journal 2	10%
Field notes journal 3	10%
Recipe Presentation and Tasting	15%
Final Exam	25%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional Excellent
A-	90% - 92%	
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: Decimal and centesimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria:

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Office Hours (5%)

Getting to know your professor makes you more comfortable with that person and therefore more likely to ask for help. It also might help for you to ask questions about the various assignments or discuss a paper idea. In this course, you get 5% of your grade for coming at least one time to office hours by Week 9.

Quizzes (15%)

Students will be assigned two short quizzes every week, each of which will be due before class time and will

not be reopened. The quiz will be on Moodle and it is not timed. Students can take the quiz as many times as they like, with the recorded grade being the average grade they receive. There will be a combination of *technical, methodological, and content questions*. The content questions will help students zoom in on the most important ideas of the readings. The methodological questions will test on skills that will pop up every week, like finding an author's argument and research methods used. The technical questions will help students learn the class's policies and administrative procedures.

Field Note Journal (10% each)

Field notes journal entries refer to the written account derived from data collected during ethnographic observations and interviews at three different food venues in Perugia. Each entry should be typed with full sentences and uploaded on Moodle by the deadline. Students will find on Moodle a full prompt.

"Food and Identity: A Personal Heritage" Recipe Presentation and Tasting (15%)

Interview a family member and ask them for a recipe that is important for them and/or for your family. Alternatively, find a recipe that's important for you. Tell the class the story of this recipe, reflecting on the meaning that it has for you or your family, and how this relates to your cultural background. Cook the recipe at home and bring a small sample to taste. Students will find on Moodle a full prompt.

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam, which is scheduled for Week 13, is based on the topics covered during the course as well as the original data collected during the ethnographic fieldwork at the two restaurants and the food kiosk in Perugia. Students will find on Moodle a full prompt.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

If students submit work after the deadline, they will incur a 10% grade deduction for each day the assignment is late. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and

any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism. Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class; earbuds are not allowed during class time. Computers and other electronic devices cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

As an instructor and as a person, I am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation related to your vision; 2) if you are using a tablet to take notes, one which is not connected to the internet; 3) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools; 4) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer.

U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

This course contributes to the achievement of one or more goals of U. N. Agenda for Sustainable Development:



Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Food: An Anthropological Perspective

Meeting 1: *Introduction to anthropology and syllabus review*

Meeting 2: *An anthropological perspective on food*

Readings for the week:

Crowther, G. (2018) 'Setting the Anthropological Table', in Crowther, G. *Eating Culture: An Anthropological Guide to Food*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. xix-xxxi.

Fischler, C. (1988) 'Food, Self and identity', *Social Science Information*, n. 27, pp. 275-292.

WEEK 2

Social and Cultural Functions of Food

Meeting 1: *Bio-cultural perspective on nutrition*

Meeting 2: *Social and religious functions of food*

Readings for the week:

Scrinis, G. (2008) 'On the Ideology of Nutritionism', *Gastronomica*, n. 8(1), pp. 39-48.

Harris, M. (1974) 'Mother Cow', in Harris, M. *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Random House, pp. 11-32.

WEEK 3

Ethnographic Research Methods

Meeting 1: *Qualitative research methods and ethnographic research*

Meeting 2: *Restaurant Ethnographic Fieldwork, Activity 1 (Ristorante Dal Mi Cocco—evening of Wednesday, Feb. 11th)*

Readings for the week:

Fetterman, D. M. (2010) *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*. 3rd ed. Applied Social Research Methods Series 17. Los Angeles: SAGE, pp. 20-26; pp. 33-53.

Paxson, H. (2019) 'Participant-observation and Interviewing Techniques', in Chrzan, J and Brett J. (eds.) *Food Culture: Anthropology, Linguistics, and Food Studies*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 92-100.

WEEK 4

Food as "Invented Tradition"

Meeting 1: *Food between tradition and innovation*

Meeting 2: *The invention of national cuisines*

Readings for the week:

West, H. G. (2020) 'Crafting innovation: Continuity and change in the "living traditions" of contemporary artisan cheesemakers', *Food and Foodways*, 28(2), pp. 91-116.

Ariel, A. (2012) 'The Hummus Wars', *Gastronomica*, 12(1), pp. 34-42.

Assignments:

Hand in Field Notes Journal 1 (Dal Mi Cocco). This assignment is meant as a trial and will receive a

Pass/Fail grade if it is handed in on time following the directions. From next time onwards, journal entries will be graded according to the rubric provided on Moodle.

WEEK 5

Food Globalization and Processes of Heritagization

Meeting 1: *Food and globalization*

Meeting 2: *Food as cultural heritage*

Readings for the week:

Crowther, G. (2018) 'Local Digestion: Making the Global at Home', in Crowther, G. *Eating Culture: An Anthropological Guide to Food*, Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, pp. 255-276.

Bestor, T. C. (2000) 'How Sushi Went Global', in Watson, J. L. and Caldwell, M. L. Caldwell (eds.) *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*, Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 13-20.

Ascione, E. (2017) "Food and Cultural Heritage: Preserving, Re-inventing and Exposing Food Cultures", pp 301-313 in *The Handbook of Food and Popular Culture*, edited by Peter Naccarato and Kathleen LeBesco. London, U.K.: Bloomsbury Publishers

WEEK 6

The Critique to Localism

Meeting 1: *Avoiding the "local trap"*

Meeting 2: *Food Artisans Ethnographic Fieldwork, Activity 2 (Chiosco Antica Salumeria Granieri)*

Readings for the week:

Born, B. and Purcell, M. (2006) 'Avoiding the Local Trap: Scale and Food Systems in Planning Research', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 26(2), pp. 195-207.

Parasecoli, F. (2021) 'Eating on the Go in Italy: Between Cibo di Strada and Street Food', *Food, Culture & Society*, 24(1), pp. 112-126.

Semester Break

WEEK 7

Alternative Food Movements and Food Activism

Meeting 1: *Industrial food production and alternative food movements: an anthropological perspective*

Meeting 2: *Slow Food and the politics of "virtuous globalization"*

Readings for the week:

Grasseni, C. (2024) 'Re-territorialising skills? Insights from ethnography on solidarity-economy food activism.' *Sustainability Science*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01527-0>

Laudan, R. (2004) "Slow Food, The French Terroir Strategy, and Culinary Modernism", *Food, Culture & Society*, 7(2), pp. 133-144.

Assignments:

Hand in Field Notes Journal 2 (Chiosco Antica Salumeria Granieri).

WEEK 8

Framing locality-based food products

Meeting 1: *Terroir and Geographical Indications*

Meeting 2: *Restaurant Ethnographic Fieldwork, Activity 3 (Ristorante Il Moderno—evening of Tuesday, Mar. 24th)*

Readings for the week:

Nowak, Z. (2012) 'Against Terroir', *Petites Propos Culinaires* [Preprint].

West, H.G. (2013) 'Appellations and Indications of Origin, Terroir, and the Social Construction and Contestation of Place-Named Foods', in A. Murcott, W.J. Belasco, and P. Jackson (eds) *The Handbook of Food Research*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 209–228.

Siniscalchi, V. (2018) 'Political Taste: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Slow Food Movement', in Counihan, C. and Højlund S. (eds.) *Making Taste Public: Ethnographies of Food and the Senses*, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 185-198.

WEEK 9

Gender, migration, and ethnic identity

Meeting 1: *Food, Gender, and Family Life*

Meeting 2: *Food, Migration, and Ethnic Identity*

Readings for the week:

Leer, J. (2022) "Gender and Barbecue: The Gendering of Tradition, Innovation and Space in the Netflix Series Chef's Table: BBQ", *Anthropology of food* [Online], 16 | 2022.

Di Giovine, M. A. (2010) 'La Vigilia Italo-Americana: Revitalizing the Italian-American Family Through the Christmas Eve 'Feast of the Seven Fishes'', *Food and Foodways*, 18 (4), pp. 181–208.

WEEK 10

In-class Presentations of "Food and Identity: A Personal Heritage"

Meeting 1: *In-class Presentations (A-L)*

Meeting 2: *In-class Presentations (M-Z)*

WEEK 11

Food, Migration, and Tourism

Meeting 1: *Food, Tourism and Cultural Change*

Meeting 2: *Capstone Trips - NO CLASS*

Readings for the week:

Ascione, E. & Fink, C. (2021) 'Italian *Sagre*: Preserving and Re-inventing Cultural Heritage and Community through Food Festivals in Umbria, Italy', *Food, Culture & Society*, 24 (2).

Assignments:

Hand in Field Notes Journal 3 (Osteria A Priori).

WEEK 12

Anthropology of Drinking and Writing Workshop

Meeting 1: *Writing workshop*

Meeting 2: *The anthropology of drinking: The case of Italian natural wines*

Readings for the week:

Elisa Ascione, Jared Belsky, Mackenzie Nelsen & Manuel Barbato (2020) “Cultivating activism through terroir: an anthropology of sustainable winemakers in Umbria, Italy”, *Food, Culture & Society*, 23(3), pp. 277-295.

WEEK 13

Final Classes, Final Exams, & Special Academic Events

Meeting 1: Final Exam