



HIST/FSST/SUST 350 The History and Culture of Food in Italy

Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 2026

Instructor: Rosa Sansone, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesdays, 12.15-13.45

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: USD\$75

Course Description

What can food history teach us about contemporary culture? In this course, we will explore the history of food in Italy as a gateway to understanding present Italian culture. By examining the factors that have shaped Italian food, cuisine, and taste, the variations in eating habits of different socio-economic classes, and the essential role played by food in constructing Italian identities, we will shed light on fundamental patterns in Italian history and society.

This exploration will lead us to consider processes of social and cultural exchange, political and religious influence, and economic and scientific development. Through a mix of discussions, readings, primary source analyses, workshops, tastings, a guest lecture and a field trip, we will investigate Italian food and culture from Antiquity to the present. After the completion of this course, students will have acquired a specific set of historical skills as a result of having developed a critical understanding of food history, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Italian culture and society, and a framework for analyzing Italian history.

This course very intentionally engages with Italian food in the present. Topics include nation and gender, alternative food systems and food justice in Italy, and climate change's effect on Italian cuisine.

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* some changes in how Italians have eaten over the last three millennia (Weekly Quiz, Course Journal, Final Exam);
- *summarize* connections between Umbria's culinary past and larger themes in Italian and world history, with particular attention to the implications of race, gender & sexuality, religious faith, and class (Course Journal, Final Exam);
- *distinguish* between primary and secondary sources (Weekly Quiz, Course Journal, Final Exam);
- *analyze* different kinds of primary sources—texts, objects, and images—for their meaning (Menu Analysis, Final Exam);
- *integrate* primary and secondary sources on the environmental, sociocultural, and economic factors in Italian food history into an argument (Final Exam).

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%
Biweekly Moodle Quizzes	25%
Course Journal	20%
One-on-one Prof Meeting	5%
Menu Analysis Presentations	10%
Final Exam	30%

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
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
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 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 have two 2 unexcused absences 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.

Biweekly Moodle Quizzes (25%)

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 skills that will pop up every week, like finding an author's argument and assessing sources. The technical questions will help students learn the class's policies and administrative procedures.

Course Journal (20%)

Students will need a notebook for the semester, which they will use as a personal space through which to reflect

on course material and ideas. In-class assignments (e.g., summaries of assigned readings, analyses of primary sources, mental maps, reflections, predictive exercises) will be regularly scheduled and graded twice throughout the semester, i.e. before the mid-semester break (Week 6) and at the end of the course (Week 12). Each of these checks is worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 20%. Students will find the full prompt on Moodle for a running list of entries and more information.

One-On-One Prof Meeting (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 attending an one-on-one professor meeting before Week 8.

Menu Analysis Presentations (10%)

Groups of two students will present a source analysis of their menu. For this, they will need to collect a menu in Perugia or another Italian location, analyze and contextualize it by relating it to course material. Students will find on Moodle a full prompt.

Final Exam (30%)

In the final exam scheduled for Week 13, students will apply what they have learned throughout the semester. They will analyze a series of primary sources and integrate secondary sources to build an overall narrative on the historical development of Italian cuisine. 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. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, earbuds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

I as an instructor and as a person 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

Introduction to the course and Roman Food (700 BCE – 476 CE)

Meeting 1: *Course introduction and analysis of historical sources*

Meeting 2: *Roman Food*

Readings for the week:

Zhen, W. (2019) 'Menu Analysis', in *Food Studies: A Hands-On Guide*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 46–47.

Kaufman, C., K. (2006) 'Ancient Rome', in *Cooking in Ancient Civilizations*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 121–131.

Corbier, M. (1999) 'The Broad Bean and the Moray: Social Hierarchies and Food in Rome', in Montanari, M. and Flandrin, J.L. (eds) *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 128–140.

Co-curricular activity:

Preparation of Apicius's aromatic salt with fresh herbs.

WEEK 2

Medieval Food (476 – 1300)

Meeting 1: *New influences on Medieval food culture*

Meeting 2: *Medieval cooking and recipes*

Readings for the week:

Montanari, M. (2012) 'Introduction: When European (Food) Culture Was Born', in Montanari, M. (ed.) *A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age*. London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 1–8.

Montanari, M. (1999) 'Romans, Barbarians, Christians & Production Structures and Food Systems in the Early Middle Ages', in *Food: A Culinary History*, pp. 165–177.

Redon, O., Sabban, F. and Serventi, S. (eds) (1998) 'The Practice of Cooking & The Aesthetics of Cooking', in Redon, O., Sabban, F., and Serventi, S., *The Medieval Kitchen: Recipes from France and Italy*. Translated by E. Schneider. Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 16–33.

Suggested reading:

Dickie, J. (2008) 'Venice, 1300s: Chinese Whispers' in *Deliziosa!: The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food*. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 45-58.

Co-curricular activity (Meeting 2):

Medieval Food Tour in Perugia

WEEK 3

Renaissance Food (1300 – 1600)

Meeting 1: *Diets and food hierarchies: The humoral theory and the Great Chain of Being*

Meeting 2: *Renaissance banquets and feasting*

Readings for the week:

Grieco, A., J. (1999) 'Food and Social Classes in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy', in *Food: A Culinary History*, pp. 302–312.

- Dickie, J. (2008) 'Rome, 1549-50: Bread and Water for Their Eminences', in *Delizial! The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food*. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 100-113.
- Taylor, V. (2005) 'Banquet Plate and Renaissance Culture: A Day in Life', *Renaissance Studies*, 19(5), pp. 621-633.

Co-curricular activity (Meeting 1):

In-class Tasting of Traditional Umbrian Foods

WEEK 4

The Columbian “Exchange” and Early Modern Food (1492 – 1800)

Meeting 1: *The Columbian Exchange revisited (and re-mapped)*

Meeting 2: *The spread of the tomato and the transformation of tastes in Italy*

Readings for the week:

- Archer, K. L. (2011) 'Columbian Exchange', in *Encyclopedia of American Environmental History*. New York: Facts On File, pp. 301-303.
- Gentilcore, D. (2009) 'Taste and the tomato in Italy: a transatlantic history', *Food and History*, 7(1), pp. 125–139.
- Montanari, M. (2013) 'Preservation and Renewal of Alimentary Identities', in *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 33-40.

WEEK 5

La Mezzadria (sharecropping) and “Traditional” Food (1800s – 2022)

Meeting 1: *Guest Lecture and Tasting of 'torta al testo'*

Meeting 2: *Agricultural systems and peasant food culture*

Readings for the week:

- Nowak, Z. (2013) 'Italian Stuffed vs. Maghreb Wrapped: Perugia's Torta al Testto Against the Kebab', in McWilliams, M. (ed.) *Wrapped and Stuffed Foods: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2012*. Totnes: Prospect Books (Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery), pp. 101–107.
- Diner, "2. Black Bread, Hard Bread: Food, Class, and Hunger in Italy". *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 21-47.
- Montanari, M. 'And at Last, the Farmers Win', in Naccarato, P., Nowak, Z., and Eckert, E.K. (eds) *Representing Italy Through Food*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, pp. 17–32.

Co-curricular activity (Meeting 1):

Torta al Testo Tasting

WEEK 6

Political Unification and Industrialization of Food (1815–1915)

Meeting 1: *The birth of the Italian nation-state and the Industrial (Food) Revolution*

Meeting 2: *The role played by Pellegrino Artusi in the culinary unification of Italy*

Readings for the week:

Capatti, A. and Montanari, M. (2003) 'Appert in Italy', in *Italian cuisine: a cultural history*. Translated by A. O'Healy. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 252-258.

Helstosky, 'Unification Through Monotony'

Montanari, M. (2013) 'The Artusian Synthesis', in *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 47-52.

Suggested Reading:

Dickie, 'Florence, 1891. Pellegrino Artusi', in *Delizial!*, pp.196-215.

Assignments:

Course Journal Entries - First Check (Wed, 25 February)

Semester Break

WEEK 7

Diasporic Italian cuisines (1870s–2022)

Meeting 1: *Italian migration and food*

Meeting 2: *Diasporic Italian cuisines*

Readings for the week:

Levenstein, H. (2002) 'The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930', in Counihan, C. (ed.) *Food in the USA: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 75–90.

Albala, K. (2018) 'Italianità in America: The Cultural Politics of Representing "Authentic" Italian Cuisine in the US', in Naccarato, P., Nowak, Z., and Eckert, E.K. (eds) *Representing Italy Through Food*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 205–218.

Co-curricular activity (Meeting 2):

Documentary Screening of "Food on the Go" by Mercedes Cordova

WEEK 8

Food, the Nation and Women under Fascism (1915–1945)

Meeting 1: *Fascist food policies and the experiences of Italian women*

Meeting 2: *Uniting and modernizing the nation*

Readings for the week:

Garvin, D. (2021) 'Fascist Foodways: *Ricettari* as Propaganda for Grain Production and Sexual Reproduction', *Food and Foodways*, 29(2), pp. 111-134.

Dickie, J. (2008) 'Milan, 1936', in *Delizial!: The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food*. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 256-268.

Helstosky, C. (2003) 'Recipe for the Nation: Reading Italian History Through La Scienza in Cucina and La Cucina Futurista', *Food and Foodways*, 11(2–3), pp. 113–140.

WEEK 9

Post-war Economic Boom and The Quest for Food Quality (1950s–2022)

Meeting 1: Post-war economic boom

Meeting 2: Changing food habits, the quest for quality

Readings for the week:

Garvin, D. (2017) 'Producing consumers: Gendering Italy through food advertisements', in Naccarato, P., Nowak, Z., and Eckert, E.K. (eds) *Representing Italy Through Food*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 141–164.

Montanari, M. (2013) 'The "Italian Miracle": Between Modernity and Tradition', in *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 59-64.

Parasecoli, F. (2014) 'Now and the Future', in *Al Dente: A History of Food in Italy*. London: Reaktion Books, pp. 198-222.

WEEK 10

Italian Food Activism

Meeting 1: Alternative food movements in Italy and The Slow Food Movement

Meeting 2: Alternative food movements in Perugia

Readings for the week:

Siniscalchi, V. (2014) 'Slow Food Activism between Politics and Economy', in Siniscalchi, V. and Counihan, C. (eds) *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, pp. 225–242.

Browse <https://www.slowfood.com/>

Co-curricular activity (Meeting 2):

Guest Lecture by Organizer of [Birà Food Coop](#)

Dinner at a Slow Food restaurant serving traditional Umbrian dishes (Wednesday, 2 April).

WEEK 11

Immigration and Food in Italy

Meeting 1: NO CLASS

Meeting 2: Migrant Labour and "authentic" Italian cuisine

Readings for the week:

Guidi, C. F. and Berti, F. (2023) 'Labour Exploitation in the Italian Agricultural Sector: The Case of Vulnerable Migrants in Tuscany,' *Front. Sociol.* 8:1234873, pp. 1-11.

Wong, E. K. (2017) 'Authenticity all'Italiana: Food discourses, diasporas, and the limits of cuisine in contemporary Italy', in Naccarato, P., Nowak, Z., and Eckert, E.K. (eds) *Representing Italy Through Food*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 33–53.

WEEK 12

Contemporary Italian Cuisine

Meeting 1: Menu Analysis Presentations

Meeting 2: Street food and the domestic character of Italian cuisine

Readings for the week:

Parasecoli, F. (2021) 'Eating on the go in Italy: between cibo di strada and street food', *Food, Culture &*

Society, 24(1), pp. 112–126.

Montanari, M. (2013) 'Epilogue: In Search of Home Cooking', in *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 73-84.

Assignments:

Course Journal Entries - Second Check (due on Wednesday, April 15)

WEEK 13

Final Classes, Final Exams, & Special Academic Events Week

Meeting 1: *Workshop on primary source analysis /Exam Revision*

Meeting 2: Final Exam

Suggested reading for the exam:

Jurafsky, D. (2014) 'How to Read a Menu', in *The Language of Food*. London; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 5-18.