



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

Course Syllabus

Summer Session II – 2026

Instructor: Zachary Nowak, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Class Meeting Days & Time: Mondays, Tuesdays, & Wednesday, 9:15am-12:15pm (exceptions noted below)

Office Hours: by appointment or after class time (FSE Office, first floor)

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: \$100

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, a guest lecture and co-curricular activities, 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. During the co-curricular activities, students will be actively engaged in the preparation and tasting of ancient Roman and traditional Umbrian food.

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, Midterm Exam, 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, Midterm Exam, 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 (Final Exam);
- *integrate* primary and secondary sources on the environmental, sociocultural, and economic factors in Italian food history into an argument (Midterm Exam, Final Exam).

Course Materials

Readings

The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Biweekly Moodle Quizzes	20%
Course Journal	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
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
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—both being in the classroom, and being there on time—is an important part of this course. You have one “sick day,” per Institute policy. As long as you are at all the other meetings, you will receive the full 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Quizzes (20%)

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

Course Journal (20%)

Students need a physical notebook 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.

by the end of Week 2 and by the end of the course (Week 4). Each of these checks is worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 20%.

Midterm Exam (25%)

The midterm exam will cover all topics presented in the first half of the course and will consist of short-answer questions. The exam will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and is closed book/closed notes.

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will cover all topics presented in the second half of the course and will consist of short-answer questions and a menu analysis. The exam will take approximately 90 minutes to complete and is closed book/closed notes.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. 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 absence per course due to illness will be considered an excused "sick day" and does 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 includes: death in immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

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 late will be marked tardy; any student arriving more than 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as absent. 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. Students are not allowed to use their cell phones or laptops while in class or during co-curricular events and activities, unless otherwise specified in the course syllabus or expressly permitted by the instructor for special learning. This policy also applies to earbuds, smart watches, headsets, etc. Students who do not respect these rules will be subject to disciplinary warnings and probation, be given an unexcused absence from class, and other disciplinary action including dismissal from the course.

Moodle

Please note that Moodle, not this syllabus, is the ultimate reference for due dates, assignment prompts, and course announcements. It is *the student's responsibility* to check the site regularly to be aware of announcements as well as to see and record all due dates for assignments.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Meeting 1 (Monday, 29 June): *Course Introduction and Roman Food*

Readings for this meeting:

- 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' aromatic salt.

Meeting 2 (Tuesday, 30 June): *Medieval Food*

Readings for this meeting:

- 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 Montanari, M. and Flandrin, J.-L. (eds), Sonnenfeld, A. (tran.) *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 165–177.

Co-curricular activity:

Guided tour of Perugia's historical traces of Medieval food.

Meeting 3 (Wednesday, 1 July): *Diets and food hierarchies: The humoral theory and the Great Chain of Being*

Readings for this meeting:

- Grieco, A., J. (1999) 'Food and Social Classes in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy', in Montanari, M. and Flandrin, J.-L. (eds), Sonnenfeld, A. (tran.) *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 302–312.

WEEK 2

Meeting 4 (Monday, 6 July): *Diets and Banquets during the Renaissance*

Readings for this meeting:

- 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.

Co-curricular activity:

In-class tasting of local typical bread, cold cuts, and cheese from Umbria region.

Meeting 5 (Tuesday, 7 July): *The Columbian "Exchange"*

Readings for this meeting:

- 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.

Co-curricular activity:

Class debate on "authenticity".

Meeting 6 (Wednesday, 8 July): *How poor is Cucina povera (peasant fare)?*

Readings for this meeting:

- Nowak, Z. (2013) 'Italian Stuffed vs. Maghreb Wrapped: Perugia's Torta al Testa 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.

Co-curricular activity:

Tasting of "traditional" Perugia's torta al testo.

Assignments:

Submit your course journal entries for the first check through Moodle (due on June 8th).

WEEK 3

Please Note: There will be **no class** on Monday, 13 July, but there **will** be class on Thursday, 16 July.

Meeting 7 (Tuesday, 14 July): *The Industrial (Food) Revolution and the Culinary Unification of Italy*

In-class midterm exam.

Readings for this meeting:

- 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.
- Montanari, M. (2013) 'The Artusian Synthesis' and 'The Numbers of Italians Increase', in *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 47-57.

Co-curricular activity:

Documentary and chocolate workshop.

Meeting 8 (Wednesday, 15 July): *Food during the Italian Diaspora, Futurism, & Fascism (1870s – 1970s)*

Readings for this meeting:

- Diner, Hasia. *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003. Read Chapter 2, "Black Bread, Hard Bread: Food, Class, and Hunger in Italy", pp. 21-47.
- Dickie, J. (2008) 'Milan, 1936', in *Delizial!: The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food*. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 256-268.

Co-curricular activity:

In-class tasting of Italian and regional specialty foods. Visit to a local gelateria and ice-cream tasting.

Meeting 9 (Thursday, 16 July): *Italian Migration to the USA and Post-war Economic Boom*

Readings for this meeting:

- Diner, *Hungering for America*. Read Chapter 3, “‘The Bread is Soft’ Italian Foodways, American Abundance”, pp. 48-83.
- Levenstein, H. (2002) ‘The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930’, in Counihan, C. (ed.) *Food in the USA: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, selected excerpts.
- 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.

Co-curricular activity:

Documentary screening “Food on the Go” in the Cinema Room of the Umbra Priori Hub

WEEK 4

Meeting 10 (Monday, 20 July): *Food Activism and Current Trends (1980s – 2026)*

Readings for this meeting:

- Browse <https://www.slowfood.com/> (in particular “About Us” and “Our Network” sections)
- Parasecoli, F. (2021) ‘Eating on the go in Italy: between cibo di strada and street food’, *Food, Culture & Society*, 24(1), pp. 112–126.

Meeting 11 (Tuesday, 21 July): *Contemporary Italian Cuisine*

Readings for this meeting:

- 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.

Co-curricular activity:

Dinner at the Slow Food restaurant, “Il Moderno”

Assignments:

In-class final exam (Wednesday, 22 July)

Submit your course journal entries for the second check through Moodle (due on 22 July).