



# NUTR/FSST 351: Food, Community, and the Mediterranean Diet

## Course Syllabus Summer Session I – 2025

**Instructor:** Christopher Fink, Ph.D.

**Credits:** 3

**Contact Hours:** 45

**Prerequisites:** none

**Class Meeting Days & Time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:15am-12:45pm

**Office Hours:** by appointment after a class or via Zoom (see Moodle site)

**Course Type:** Standard Course

**Course Fee:** USD\$ 205

### Course Description

The Mediterranean Diet has often been promoted as one of the healthiest diets in the world. It has found broad appeal in part because of its rich, fresh flavors, and focus on ‘traditional,’ often romanticized foods. But, the role of community, conviviality, and connection through food is often ignored.

In this course we will examine the history of the Mediterranean Diet, how it rose to prominence, and how it is put into practice in and through the community: at markets, kitchens, gardens, in general discourse and rhetoric, and at the dinner table in present-day Italy, particularly in Perugia, and more broadly in Umbria.

Aside from course content, students will have the opportunity to get hands-on experiences outside of the classroom to more effectively understand the nature of food and community. There will be a strong emphasis on the reflection of these out-of-class and hands-on experiences. The course will include opportunities to interact with producers and market vendors, participate in tastings of typical Mediterranean-diet products like olive oil, ancient grains, wine, and other foods. These experiences are aimed at better understanding the role that food plays in contemporary Italian society, and how this role meshes with the key aspects of the Mediterranean Diet.

### 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:

- *Describe* the key dietary and behavioral features of the Mediterranean Diet, as described in the literature;
- *Apply* the understanding of the construct of community in an Italian food context;
- *Conduct* structured, detailed observations of key community features that influence diet in a Mediterranean setting, and describe these findings;
- *Demonstrate*, through in-class tasks and field experiences, their critical perspective on how food production and consumption in Italy matches with the key tenets of the Mediterranean Diet and of Community;
- *Reflect*, in an informed manner, on their experiences living in a Mediterranean Culture, and the impact on their food behaviors and values.

### Course Materials

#### Readings

Required readings are an essential part of the class. Reading assignments **MUST** be completed by the start of class, and will periodically be followed up by short written assignments (see next section).

## Assessment

Class Engagement and Participation	25%
Reflective Visitor Project	10%
Reading Questions and Assignments (Pre-Course Assignments, Grocery Task, Reflections, etc.)	30%
Final Project	35%

## 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 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.

### *Class Engagement and Participation (15%)*

Class participation points are not automatic. They are based on actual participation in the class discussions, both in classroom and field experiences. The learning experience in a study abroad setting like this really relies heavily on the engagement and participation of all participants. Participation also means being prepared for class - completing the assigned readings, written tasks, etc. Students should also keep all written and in-class tasks, as these will be referred to throughout the semester, and will aid in their participation in the class.

### *Reflective Visitor Project (10%)*

This project will be ongoing through the term, and is meant to highlight student conceptions (and changes in those conceptions) about the social, structural, cultural, and of course food-related experiences in Italy. Students will be required to use digital photographs and brief descriptions to document these issues. The end goal is to have students maintain their engagement and reflection on the experience.

### *Reading Questions and Assignments (30%)*

These assignments will vary through the semester. There may be several types of assignments:

1. In-class: these will be short tasks that take place in class, and allow us to start the discussion about experiences, readings, etc.;
2. Reading questions: due on the day when material is to be discussed;
3. Experiential reflections: due on the day following the experience; and
4. Other tasks, such as quick observations, analysis, etc.

All work must be completed and turned in on time. Written assignments will vary in length.

#### *Final Project (35%)*

The final project will have a digital and in-person component, and will be cumulative, covering material from the entire semester. This project will serve to bring together all of the material that was studied through the semester. The project must be passed to receive a passing grade in the course.

#### **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.

#### **Additional Course Information**

There are numerous problems lurking out there waiting to sabotage the timely presentation of students' work, be it reading for class or a written assignment. These can be "external" (late trains, power outages, computer crashes) or "internal" (too much time away on the weekend, lack of adequate research, not enough time devoted to revision). Note that the former tends to be a problem only when there is a problem with the latter, i.e., late trains only cause late assignments when those assignments were not begun early enough in the first place. These potential problems can be avoided by not leaving assignments for the last minute, and by allowing extra time to complete them. Travel should also be planned around class meetings and coursework, not the reverse. Unless otherwise stated, assignments are due at the beginning of the class period. Assignments handed in later (during or after class) will be considered one day late. It is in students' best interest not only to begin assignments early, but also to submit work on time so that it will receive full credit and the professor will have time to review it before the next assignment.

All work must be completed to pass this course. Back up your work or send it to yourself via email occasionally while writing.

#### **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 4% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences (4 or more, not including the excused "sick day") may lead to receiving 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 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 1% 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, ear buds, 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 and headsets. 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

Date	Class #	Topic	Reading	Due
Tues 5/20	1	<b>Introductions and Influences</b> <i>Themes:</i> Who are we, as a class? What preconceptions do we have around healthy eating? What lenses do we bring to this experience? How does this influence our food choices and our attitudes about food?	None	
	2	<b>Mediterranean Diet Components and Definitions</b> <i>Themes:</i> What are the different ways by which the MD is defined? What are its components? Can you build a meal plan from the information in class? Explore the supermarket!  Assign Reflective Visitor Project	None	MD Grocery Store Task
Thurs 5/22	3	<b>Mediterranean Diet History, Health Research, Food Synergy</b> <i>Themes:</i> History of the health conception of the Mediterranean diet, role in chronic disease. How can a reductionist approach to diet and nutrition can minimize the enjoyment and health benefits of food? How can the foods themselves, more than the components of the foods, be predictive of health benefits? What is the role of the Mediterranean diet in chronic disease, mechanisms and evidence for prevention?	Nestle and Keys Articles	Nestle & Keys Reading Questions
	4	<b>Market Visit 1</b> <i>Themes:</i> What do you see at the market? Structured observation - practice and debrief		
Tues 5/27	5	<b>Food, Identity, and Culture</b> <i>Themes:</i> How does place, our family history, and our experiences around food help to shape and reinforce identity?	Identity Reading	Identity Reading Questions  Reflective Visitor 1
	6	<b>Food, Identity, and Culture, Contd.</b> <i>Themes:</i> How does place, our family history, and our experiences around food help to shape and reinforce identity?		
Thurs 5/29	7	<b>Food and Festival</b> <i>Themes:</i> How do local and regional food traditions manifest themselves through festival and celebration?	Fink & Ascione Reading	Reading Questions

	8	<b>Field Trip Prep, Reflective Visitor Check-In and Final Project Assignment and Organization</b> <i>Themes:</i> Work on reflective visitor digital presence and discuss final project. Prepare for field trip.		
Fri 5/30	Field Trip	<b>Field Trip to Orsini Farm</b>	Web Homework	Preview Questions for Field Trip
Tues 6/3	9	<b>Community, Sense of Community, Food Projects</b> <i>Themes:</i> What is community, what is sense of community? How do communities organize around food-related projects and food procurement?	McMillan and Chavis Reading	Reading Questions Reflective Visitor 2
	10	<b>Orto Sole Tour and Discussion</b> <i>Themes:</i> Tour Umbra's own Orto Sole and discuss various projects that are happening there		
Thurs 6/5	11	<b>Guest Lecture - Fuori di Zucca</b>		
	12	<b>Guest Lecture - Fuori di Zucca</b>		
Tues 6/10	13	<b>Spaces of Food and Community: Markets</b> <i>Themes:</i> Practices and artifacts of food processing and preparation		Market Reading (Black). <i>Fare la spesa e Nostrano.</i> Show video: <a href="https://enjoy piedmont.com/en/mercato-centrale-torino-porta-palazzo/">https://enjoy piedmont.com/en/mercato-centrale-torino-porta-palazzo/</a> Reflective Visitor 3
	14	<b>Spaces of Food and Community: Restaurants/Cafes + Observation</b> <i>Themes:</i> Conduct and Debrief observation in restaurant/cafe		OR Solidarity buying group visit
Thurs 6/12	15	<b>Market Visit #2</b> <i>Themes:</i> Connecting our knowledge thus far with practice - procuring food		Recipes for Kitchen
	16	<b>Kitchen Session #2</b> <i>Themes:</i> Practicing connecting our market experiences with consumption in the kitchen		-
Tues 6/17	17	<b>Spaces of Food and Community: Kitchens and Dining Tables: Consumption and Conviviality</b> <i>Themes:</i> How do we make meaning and form identity, connect with others, and reinforce social norms through consuming and sharing food?		Women/Kitchen/Sharing Reading - Moyer - Veronica e Luigina Reflective Visitor 4
	18	<b>Project Work</b>		Project Draft Review

		<b>Sagra in Castiglione del Lago - Departure time TBD</b>		
Thurs 6/19	19	<b>Final Project - Work</b>		Final Project Draft
	20	<b>Market Visit - Prepare for Food Prep/Project</b>		
Fri 6/20	Final	<b>Final Exam Time - Recipe Demos and Presentations</b>		Final Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Final Project Guidelines</b></li> <li>● <b>Final Project Resources</b></li> </ul>

## Bibliography

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