
Sustainable Foods of Italy

COURSE DESIGNATOR ROME 3008

Language of Instruction English

NUMBER OF CREDITS 3

Contact Hours 45

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The object of the course is a definition of Italy's cultural identity through its food production, gastronomic traditions, culinary techniques, table myths and rituals, seen in relation to the country's long and complex process of unification and with the aim to show that, for their marked "regionality", Italian food systems can often exemplify a very special route to excellence and sustainability.

After the Middle Ages, the process of political and territorial recomposition of Europe led rapidly, in countries like France, Spain, England - with the sole exception of Germany - to the formation of great and powerful national monarchies. In Italy, however, that process stopped at the regional level, a destiny that determined the life of the peninsula in all its forms and expressions, including eating habits, until the achievement of national unity in the nineteenth century and beyond.

It will be one of the course objectives to explore the regional, not to say "municipal", matrix of Italian cooking, many of whose most renowned dishes are named not by chance after one city or another, since from early in the second millennium, it was into the hundred cities of Italy that the produce of the countryside was channeled and used to build a rich food culture. This "locality" of the Italian cooking system will be examined not only in its "high" manifestations, of which the lavish and astonishing banquets of the Renaissance and the Baroque Age represent the supreme examples, but also with regard to "street food" and the scanty diet of the poor, from which nonetheless came culinary inventions that still survive intact even as they lend themselves to creative revisitations by today's experimental chefs.

As to this latter point, it will be a further aim of this course to show that a unifying feature of Italian gastronomy, at all levels, can be found in the same preoccupation for the beautiful, the well made and the tasteful that generally informs other artifacts for which Italy is famous, from the great masterpieces of art, to the creations of fashion and design. There is a thread that runs from certain famous Renaissance painters and architects, who are reported to have "built" elaborate dishes for special events, and the current interplay between the philosophy of Italian nouvelle cuisine and the design of the restaurants and table settings meant to frame its elegant presentations.

Besides these aesthetic considerations, equal emphasis will be put on another intrinsic feature of Italian food culture: the insistence, regardless of any dish's degree of stylishness and sophistication, on good quality and genuineness. This explains why in the past two decades Italy has become a prime model in the production, selection and cooking of ingredients. Ever more popular is the widespread belief that health, environment, and quality of life may depend on the food lessons that the so-called Mediterranean diet has to offer.

Throughout, it will be a primary goal of the course to present and discuss Italian Food Culture from the point of view of sustainability. Specifically because of their strong ties with the surrounding territory, their reliance on local products and markets, and their respect for the traditional lore and deep cultural significance that informs the preparation of typical dishes, Italian food systems have proved so far a powerful antidote to contemporary standardization and globalization. Not by chance is Italy the European country that allots the largest portion of its territory to biological cultivation, of which it is the biggest exporter in the world. Notable also are the increasing efforts of Italian public authorities, within the European Community, towards the protection and promotion of products of controlled origin, and the important role played by associations such as Symbola, Green Italy and, above all, Slow Food, the now international movement originated in Italy some twenty-five years ago, with the intent to counteract fast food and fast life and to promote the safeguarding of local production of foods and wines, the preservation of indigenous gastronomic traditions and recipes, and the creation of a new kind of ecologically aware consumerism committed to quality and sustainability.

The course will be structured around the following topics:

Italian Food: national and/or regional?: Lectures will discuss the peculiar dialectic between national and regional by relating it to the country's delayed unification, and by comparing it with an equally famous but more "centralized" European culinary tradition, such as the French one. They will also provide a gastronomic mapping of Italy, highlighting,

region by region, the typicality of their cuisine and related food systems.

The Italian Way to sustainability: Although the pressure of food industry and the hectic rhythms of contemporary life have begun to affect even the Italian style of eating, especially in great metropolitan areas, Italy still represents a significant model of how to combine excellence and sustainability, thanks to the strength of its traditions and the several initiatives being taken to preserve and promote them.

The Formation of Taste: A socio-historical survey of the development of cooking traditions in the peninsula which will be articulated in three phases: 1) The Legacy of Ancient Rome; 2) The Renaissance Banquet and after; 3) From Pellegrino Artusi to the emergence of the Italian nouvelle cuisine.

Food and Religion: The influence of the Catholic liturgical calendar on food rituals and on weekly and annual variations of diet, e.g. Carnival and Lent, and the days or periods of lean and fatty diets. Although diminished by the increasing secularization of society and by a slackening of proscriptions by the Roman Church, the course will show how powerful this influence has been, for instance as far as the “culture of fish” is concerned.

The Table of the Poor: Alongside the haute cuisine, meant for diners of status and involving prestigious ingredients and exotic flavorings that hint at distant regions, there developed in Italy an equally great tradition of a more homely and familiar way of preparing and consuming food, linked to seasonal products of the territory and to age old skills.

A Healthier Style of Eating: The launching in the early 90s of the so-called Mediterranean diet, made up mostly of grains, fruits, beans, and vegetables, and including little meat and plenty of olive oil, as a means to prevent obesity, cardiovascular disease and many types of cancer. Lectures will examine this relevant aspect, with the contribution of a major expert in the field.

INSTRUCTOR

Sergio Rufini

COURSE GOAL

The course aims to define Italy’s cultural identity through an analysis of its food systems, of their historically determined locality and of their unique interfusion of excellence and sustainability. At the end of the course, students should be able to delineate and locate the gastronomic “excellencies” of Italy in their regional and sociohistorical context, and also evaluate them in relation to their sustainable aspects.

Our age is generally losing interest in the food we eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices impact the rest of the world. This course is intended to sharpen the students’ awareness both of the quality of foodstuffs and of the environmental, social and dietetic consequences that their styles of eating can have, fostering in them not only “good taste”, but also a more responsible attitude towards their own health and the ethics of sustainability.

In addition to its theoretical analysis, this course will involve direct experience in the field, consisting of excursions to sites (farms, oil-mills, cellars, local markets, restaurants) where foods are produced and consumed. There will be also actual cooking lessons that should help students to familiarize themselves with the technical and material aspects of gastronomy.

Each student will be assigned a research project on the culinary tradition of one of the Italian regions treated during the course. Students will present this individual research to the class for discussion, and develop a term paper based on their research, readings, and information gathered from class excursions and experiences.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

General learning outcomes:

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

Identify, define, and solve problems; locate and critically evaluate information; master a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry; understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies; communicate effectively; understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines; acquire skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.

METHODOLOGY

One three-hour class per week, in which lectures, excursions and seminars will alternate.

Lectures will be followed by a class discussion in which students will participate, drawing on the reading material assigned as homework, as well as on the theoretical basis provided by the instructor. Seminars will consist of student-led group workshops in which the most relevant issues arising from the topics presented during the course will be investigated and discussed.

Out-of-class activities

The instructor will lead students on several visits and excursions meant to provide them with a first hand experience of what they are learning in class. A number of professionals will be invited to discuss their work, thereby affording the students insight to various activities connected with the culture of food. A chef will give a brief cooking seminar regarding the gastronomy of the four regions selected for the course.

Class participation and attendance

Participation is a vital part of your grade, which means mandatory attendance. Students are also expected to participate actively and critically in class discussions, and the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. Students must read assignments BEFORE the class, and come in on time. If you need to miss class for medical reasons, please let the Director of Academic Affairs know in advance of meetings so plans can be made accordingly. If you miss any meetings without an excused absence from the Director, your final grade will be lowered accordingly. Students are responsible for making up any missed assignments.

Oral Presentations & Papers

The topics for the oral presentations will be chosen by students from a list proposed by the professor. Each presentation should not exceed 20 minutes and students are expected to transform their presentation into a paper of about 2000 words. The paper should include pertinent references to at least two secondary academic sources. Criticism and personal opinions are particularly encouraged!

Mid-Term & Final Exams

The mid-term exam consists of two parts (I. 8 short questions – short answers; II. An essay question) regarding the topics discussed up until that point (all questions will require an answer). The final exam consists of two parts (I. 8 short questions – short answers; II. two essays) and concerns the topics discussed after the mid-term exam.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

No prerequisites are needed. The mid-term and final exams will be based on the material presented in class. An oral presentation and a written paper are compulsory. Students are requested to respect the deadlines indicated in the syllabus. Students are recommended to take notes on the material presented in class; part of the information provided by the professor is complementary to that in the readings. Information deriving from excursions, colleagues' oral presentations, and other material discussed in class is an integral part of the course and should be appropriately assimilated by students, with a view to improving their performance in exams and in their general intellectual profile.

REQUIRED READING/MATERIALS

C. Petrini, *Slow Food. The Case for Taste*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001; A.Dalby/S.Grainger, *The Classical Cookbook*, British Museum Press, 1996; J.Dickie, *Delizia!The Epic History of Italians and their Food*, Free Press, New York/London/ Toronto, 2008; M. Montanari, *Food is Culture*, Columbia University Press, 2004; M. Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma. A Natural History of four Meals*, Penguin, 2006; L. Starke/L. Mastny, eds., *State of the World 2010. Transforming Cultures from Consumerism to Sustainability*, Earthscan, 2010; G. Riley, *The Oxford Companion to Italian Food*, Oxford University Press, 2007; Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, South End Press, 2000; Gert Spaargaren/ A.M.Loeber/Peter Oosterveer, eds., *Food Practices in Transition: Changing Food Consumption, Retail and Production in the Age of Reflexive Modernity (Routledge Studies in Sustainability Transition)*, Routledgr, 2011.

GRADING

CRITERIA FOR GRADING AND GRADING STANDARDS

Grading Rubric		
A	95+	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90-94	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	86-89	
B	83-85	
B-	80-82	
C+	76-79	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C	73-75	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
C-	70-72	
D+	66-69	
D	60-65	
F	<59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of how grades are weighted:

Group discussion/ class participation/ quickwrites	15%
Midterm exam – short questions/ answers	10%
Midterm exam – essay question	15%
Presentation	15%
Paper	15%
Final exam – short questions/ answers	6%
Final exam – essay 1 question	15%
Final exam – essay 2 (secondary)	9%
Overall Grade	100%

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1/2

- Topics:
 - Italian Food: national or/and regional? : Besides trying to answer this question so intrinsic to the foods of Italy, a map will be drawn of the most famous regional “specialties” and related food systems.
 - The Italian way to sustainability: Although the pressure of food industry and the hectic rhythms of contemporary life have begun to affect even the Italian style of eating, especially in great metropolitan areas, Italy still represents a significant model of how to combine excellence and sustainability.
- Reader: pp. 3-8; 105-9; 128-178
- Activities:
 - Course presentation; distribution of the syllabus; course requirements and course expectations; methodology. Lecture on the specific topic.
 - Class discussion and presentations.
 - Cooking class

WEEK 3/4

- Topics:
 - The Formation of Taste. A socio-historical survey of the development of Italian gastronomy:
 - The Legacy of Ancient Rome.
 - Medieval Gastronomy
 - Food and Religion: The influence of the Catholic liturgical calendar on food rituals linked to religious festivities and implying weekly or annual variations of diet. Carnival vs Lent.
- Reader: pp. 9-32; 111-23
- Activities:
 - Lectures on the specific topic
 - Class discussion and presentations

WEEK 5/6

- Topic:
 - The Formation of Taste
 - The Renaissance Banquet and after
 - Pellegrino Artusi and the birth of “Italian” cuisine.
- Reader: pp. 33-57; 76-85; 86-98
- Activities:
 - Lecture on the specific topic
 - Class discussion and presentations
- MID TERM EXAM

WEEK 7

- BREAK

WEEK 8

- Activities:
 - Cooking Class

WEEK 9/10

- Topic:
 - The Table of the Poor: Alongside the haute cuisine, meant for diners of status and involving prestigious ingredients and exotic flavorings that hint at distant regions, there developed in Italy an equally great tradition of a more homely and familiar way of preparing and consuming food, linked to seasonal products of the territory.
- Reader: pp. 59-75; 86-99

WEEK 11/12

- Topic:
 - Quality and Sustainability: The philosophy and practice of Slow Food
- Reader: pp. 99-104; 125-27; 269-326
- Activities:
 - Lectures on the specific topic
 - Class discussions and presentations
 - Cooking class
 - Abruzzo study tour

WEEK 13//14

- Topic:
 - Quality and Sustainability: Fish. How our love of seafood is devastating the world's oceans.
- Reader: pp. 179-258
- Activities:
 - Showing of the film by Rupert Murray, the End of the Line
 - Class discussion

WEEK 15

- FINALS

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular attendance and punctuality are mandatory in order to earn full marks. The final grade will take into consideration preparation required for class (i.e. readings) and participation in class discussions. If you miss any meetings without an excused absence from the on-site director, your final grade will be dropped accordingly. In the case of absences, it is the student's responsibility to find out what information was given in class including any announcements made.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY:

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

STUDENT CONDUCT

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct and student needs. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.