

Theory and Method in the Anthropology of Food: Italy and Globalization

Course description:

This course will explore anthropological theories about and methods to study beliefs and behaviors surrounding food production, distribution and consumption, with case material from Tuscany, the Mediterranean, and around the globe.

Course objectives:

1. Students will learn some of the theories and methods used by anthropologists to study foodways.
2. Students will learn about anthropological fieldwork and writing by conducting a study of a food producer, process, and product in Italy.
3. Students will learn about the cuisines of Tuscany, the Mediterranean, and the Afro-Caribbean region, their roots in specific environments and production systems, and their evolution in the present.
4. Students will learn some of the ways that food figures in economic and social relations and ideology across cultures.

Requirements:

1. Students will do the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in class.
2. Students will write a one-page essay on “The essence of Tuscan foodways.”
3. Students will conduct a Food Producer-Process-Product Fieldwork Project
 - Pick a food producer, process, and product and conduct at least two ethnographic interviews about their history, development, and current existence. Projects might focus on a home cook and his/her favorite recipe, an artisanal cheesemaker and a particular cheese, a vintner and a favorite wine, a backyard gardener and an heirloom tomato, a chef and a signature dish, a baker and a regional bread, or whatever strikes your interest.
 - Your project should address the questions: How does the product, producer and production process contribute to or detract from the Slow Food goals of good, clean and fair food?
 - Conduct at least two interviews, take detailed notes, take photos, make sketches or diagrams, collect informant documentation (such as recipes, photos, menus, publicity, etc):
 - * Describe the product and process: appearance, colors, sounds, smells, temperature.
 - * Observe production if possible, take photos and notes.
 - * Who does what? Detailed description of people and their roles.
 - * What raw materials are needed, what technology, tools, techniques?
 - * History: how did informant make/grow/cook this, how learned and from whom?
 - * Why this product in this way? Significance? Pros and cons? Important memories?
 - * Economic issues?
 - Write a 4-5 page report (word-processed, double-spaced), and share findings orally with the class as a visual and oral presentation (e.g. powerpoint).

Required Readings:

Counihan, Carole. 2004. Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence. New York: Routledge.

Guerron-Montero, Carla. 2004. “Afro-Antillean Cuisine and Global Tourism.” Food, Culture, and Society 7, 2:29-47.

Lisa Heldke. 2001. Let’s Cook Thai. Recipes for Colonialism. In Pilaf, Posole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 175-198.

Leitch, Alison. 2003. Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity. Ethnos, 68, 4:437-462.

Nabhan, Gary Paul. 2004. The Shaping and Shipping Away of Mediterranean Cuisines. In Some Like It Hot: Food, Genes, and Cultural Diversity, Washington: Island Press, pp. 92-111.

Syllabus

Class	Topics	Assignments
1 Mon June 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theory and method in the anthropology of food - What do anthropologists study, how, and why? - Food Producer-Process-Product Fieldwork project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read Counihan, <i>Around the Tuscan Table</i>
2 Tu June 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethnographic fieldwork methodology: food-centered life histories, participant-observation, student projects - How have Tuscan cuisine, diet and culture evolved? - What and how do food-centered life histories communicate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write one page essay on: “The essence of Tuscan foodways” - Begin Food Producer-Process-Product
3 Fri June 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food Producer-Process-Product: methods - Food globalization, diet, health, and culture - Local autonomy and global markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct fieldwork on Food Producer-Process-Product - Read Nabhan, “Mediterranean Cuisines” - Read Leitch, “Slow Food”
4 M June 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What factors cause foodways to change? - What leads people to try new foods? - What are the meanings embedded in the changing global food system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read Guerron-Montero, “Afro-Antillean Cuisine” - Read Heldke, “Let’s Cook Thai”
5 Tu June 12	Comparative perspectives on the anthropology of food in Italy: STUDENT ORAL REPORTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare written and oral report on food product and producer

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