



SYLLABUS

SPANISH FOOD AND CULTURE

Instructor: Laura Arranz Bannon

Contact Hrs: 40

Language of Instruction: English

Total Hours of Student Engagement (THSE) in all course activities*: 120

Level: 300

SEGOVIA, SPAIN

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an in-depth exploration of Spanish food and culture as a lens through which to understand Spain's history, geography, traditions, and social practices. Students will examine how regional landscapes, historical influences, and cultural values have shaped Spanish gastronomy and everyday life. Through the study of local festivals, religious and secular holidays, traditional dishes, and culinary techniques, the course highlights the close relationship between food, identity, and community in Spain. Readings, visual materials, and short written tasks will encourage students to reflect on cultural practices, compare them with their own experiences, and develop a nuanced understanding of Spain's cultural diversity. No prior knowledge of Spanish is required, as all materials are presented in English.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this course is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of Spanish culture through the study of food, traditions, and everyday practices. By the end of the course, students will be able to identify key regional differences within Spain, explain how history and geography have influenced Spanish gastronomy and cultural traditions, and recognize the social and symbolic role of food in Spanish life. The course aims to develop students' cultural awareness and intercultural competence by encouraging them to analyze Spanish practices in comparison with those of the United States and other cultural frameworks familiar to students.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

This course combines lectures, guided discussions, visual materials, and experiential learning activities. When possible, the course will also incorporate the reading and guided analysis of academic journal articles. Instruction integrates historical and

cultural context with the analysis of food practices, using images, maps, charts, and short readings to support comprehension. Class sessions encourage active participation through group discussions, brief written reflections, and comparative activities that invite students to relate Spanish cultural practices to their own experiences. In addition to classroom-based instruction, the course incorporates experiential learning activities designed to connect theoretical content with lived cultural practices. These may include a guided visit to the Jewish Didactical Center in Segovia; a visit to a local street market; and a visit to a gourmet shop specializing in Segovian products. The course may also feature a guest lecture by a wine entrepreneur, and a guest lecture on flamenco culture. Additionally, students will visit an eco-friendly artisan shop in Segovia, providing a case study in sustainable production.

METHOD OF EVALUATION/GRADING

Student performance in this course will be assessed through a combination of exams, participation, and assignments. Attendance is compulsory, and students are expected to attend all class sessions. More than three unjustified absences may negatively affect the final grade. Assessments are structured to balance formal exams with active engagement in class and practical assignments, encouraging both understanding and application of course content.

Grade Breakdown:

- Class Participation: 20% – Includes engagement in discussions, response to prompts, and attentiveness during lectures.
- Assignments and Activities: 15% – Includes a variety of tasks such as: Short written reflections on readings or lectures, mini-research projects on regional dishes, festivals, or cultural traditions, brief presentations to the class, in-class exercises and small group tasks
- Oral presentation project: 15%
- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic

misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at <https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism>.

Generative AI Course Policy Statement

The use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools is permitted in this course as a support resource for research and information gathering. Students may use AI tools to search for, explore, and obtain information relevant to their academic work.

However, any information generated or retrieved with the assistance of AI must be critically evaluated, reworked, and integrated into the student's own perspective.

Students are expected to demonstrate critical thinking skills, assess the reliability and relevance of the information obtained, and analyze it according to the specific academic perspective, approach, or criteria indicated by the instructor.

If you're unsure whether a certain use of AI is acceptable, please ask the professor.

Accessible Education

The University of Oregon and I are dedicated to fostering inclusive learning environments for all students and welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's activities.

COURSE OUTLINE

This course is structured in three interconnected parts. The first part focuses on Geography, History, and Culinary Identity, examining how climate, landscape, and historical processes have shaped regional food traditions and cultural continuity in Spain. The second part explores Major Festivals: Ritual, Symbolism, and Social Meaning, analyzing food-related celebrations as collective practices that express identity, memory, power, and social cohesion. The final part addresses Media and Global Context, considering how Spanish food culture is represented, transformed, and circulated through contemporary media, celebrity chefs, and global audiences.

Geography, History & Culinary Identity

1. Spain at a Glance: Geography, History & Culinary Identity

- Spain as a crossroads: Mediterranean, Atlantic, Europe, Africa
- Geography and climate zones → agricultural diversity
- Historical layers and their gastronomic legacy:
 - Roman Hispania (oil, wine, wheat)
 - Al-Ándalus (rice, spices, citrus, sugar)
 - Jewish and Christian food traditions

- The Columbian exchange (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers)

Activity Map-based food geography: “*What grows where and why?*”

Visit to the Jewish Quarter Educational Center; Jewish traditions and their historical and religious significance

2. Mediterranean Spain: Climate, Classical Heritage, and the Mediterranean Diet

- Climate & Geography; Mild winters, hot summers, long coastlines
- Olive groves, vineyards, cereal agriculture

Historical Background

- Strong legacy of **Greek and Roman colonization**
- Integration into Mediterranean trade networks
- Long continuity of agricultural practices since antiquity

Gastronomic Foundations

- Olive oil, wheat, wine, vegetables, legumes, fresh fish and seafood

Cultural Legacy

- The Mediterranean diet as both a nutritional and cultural system
- Daily meal rituals, commensality, and seasonal eating
- UNESCO recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Visit to a local street market to analyze regional produce, seasonality, and everyday food economies

3. Andalusia: Heat, Al-Ándalus, and Cultural Syncretism

- Climate & Geography; Hot, dry climate with fertile river valleys
- Advanced irrigation systems

Historical Background

- Nearly eight centuries of **Islamic presence (Al-Ándalus)**
- Agricultural innovation and scientific knowledge
- Later Christian reconquest and cultural layering

Gastronomic Foundations

- Cold soups (gazpacho, salmorejo), citrus fruits, almonds, olive oil
- Frying techniques and preserved foods

Cultural Legacy

- Food adapted to extreme heat and seasonal rhythms

- Syncretic cuisine combining Islamic, Jewish, and Christian elements

Visit to an eco-friendly artisan shop in Segovia; a collective project led by self-employed women artisans working in fields such as leather, pottery, design, and jewelry.

4. Northern Spain (Atlantic): Rain, Pastoralism, and Communal Traditions

- Climate & Geography; Cool, wet Atlantic climate
- Lush pastures and coastal waters

Historical Background

- Limited Romanization in some areas
- Strong medieval rural communities
- Late industrialization and preservation of local traditions

Gastronomic Foundations

- Dairy products, beans, seafood, hearty stews and slow-cooked dishes
- Cider and regional wines

Cultural Legacy

- Strong regional identities (Galicia, Asturias, Basque Country)

5. Central Spain: Continental Climate, Scarcity, and Resilience

- Climate & Geography; Extreme temperatures
- Dry plateaus and limited agricultural diversity

Historical Background

- Castile as the political center of medieval and early modern Spain
- Recurrent famines and rural poverty
- Central role of transhumance and livestock

Gastronomic Foundations

- Legumes, bread, lamb, pork, cured meats, one-pot meals and slow cooking

Cultural Legacy

- Preservation techniques (curing, salting, drying)

Visit to a gourmet shop specializing in Segovian products to examine processes of food valorization, heritage branding, and authenticity

6. The Canary Islands: Isolation, Conquest, and Cultural Continuity

- Climate & Geography; Subtropical climate

- Volcanic soils and geographic isolation

Historical Background

- Indigenous Guanche population
- Late conquest by Castile (15th century)
- Strategic Atlantic position in colonial trade routes

Gastronomic Foundations

- Gofio, potatoes, fish, mojo sauces and simple preparations

Cultural Legacy

- Persistence of indigenous food practices
- Hybrid identity between Europe, Africa, and the Atlantic

Reading and analysis of the article “ Spanish Gastronomy and Richard Ford’s The Spaniards and their Country” (2025)

Major Festivals: Ritual, Symbolism, and Social Meaning

7. Las Fallas (Valencia): Fire, Satire, and Collective Renewal

- Ritual destruction and rebirth through fire
- Satirical representations of political and social figures
- Rice culture and regional agricultural identity

8. La Tomatina (Buñol): Excess, Play, and the Ethics of Food Waste

- Ritualized food destruction and collective play
- Transformation from local festivity to global tourist event
- Tensions between celebration, sustainability, and ethics

9. San Fermín (Pamplona): Risk and Spectacle

- The ritualization of danger and controlled chaos
- Media spectacle and global visibility

10. Easter and Christmas: Religion, Food Taboos, and Collective Memory

- Public ritual and religious performance
- Fasting, abstinence, and symbolic foods

11. Feria de Abril (Seville): Gender, Class, and Social Display

- Traditional dress, dance, and flamenco

- Food, alcohol, and public sociability

Guest lecture on flamenco, live dance demonstration and discussion of flamenco as a form of intangible cultural heritage.

12. Media & Global Context

- Spain's culinary image in international media; Digital platforms, documentaries, and food television
- Transformation of chefs into cultural ambassadors; *José Andrés and Family in Spain* (documentary analysis)
- Humanitarian food activism and ethical responsibility (chef José Andrés)
- New Spanish cooking and Michelin-star innovation (Ferran Adrià, Basque culinary revolution)

Oral Presentation Project

As part of the course, students will complete an individual oral presentation focused on a topic related to Spanish food, culture, and society.

Students will deliver a 10–15 minute presentation, supported by visual materials such as slides (PowerPoint, Google Slides, or similar). Presentations will take place throughout the course, once the student feels prepared, and must be completed before the final week of the semester. This flexible schedule allows students to integrate course content progressively as their understanding develops.

Suggested Topics

Students may choose one of the following topics or propose an alternative topic, subject to instructor approval:

- Tourism and food authenticity in Spain
- Globalization vs. local food products
- Fast food vs. slow food movements
- Rural depopulation and its impact on food traditions
- Regional continuity: Which regions show the strongest connections between past and present food practices?
- Spain's culinary image in international media

Presentation Expectations

Presentations should:

- Include historical, cultural, and social context

- Use examples from Spain (regions, festivals, food practices)

Students may incorporate images, maps, charts, or short video clips to support their analysis, but slides should complement the oral presentation rather than replace it.

COURSE READINGS / BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Medina, F. (2005) *Food Culture in Spain*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Ortí, P. (2014) *The A to Z of Spanish Culture*. London. The Spanglish Project.
- Andrés, J. (2008) *Made in Spain*. New York: Clarkson Potter.
- Walker, L. & Walker, A. (1997) *To the Heart of Spain*. Berkeley. Berkeley Hills Books
- Zajaczkowska, J. (2022). *A complete guide to Spanish cuisine*.
- UNESCO Report, *The Mediterranean Diet*, Nomination File no. 00394
- Baniou, T. (2024). Tracing culinary practices in the western provinces of the Roman Empire using organic residue analysis. *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences*, 16, Article 103.
- Martín Pinilla, E. (2025). *Spanish gastronomy and Richard Ford's "The Spaniards and their country"* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. University of Valladolid.
- Aguirregoitia-Martínez, A. and Fernández-Poyatos, M. D (2017) "*The gestation of modern gastronomy in Spain (1900-1936)*" *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 6 (2): e019.
- Perry, Katherine F., "You Are What You Eat: Gastronomy and Geography of Southern Spain" (2015). Honors Theses. 346.