



## SYLLABUS

**FOOD AND CULTURE IN  
ITALY Instructor: Sara Silvestri  
Contact Hrs: 40  
Language of Instruction: English**

**SIENA, ITALY**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an interdisciplinary analysis of foodways in Italy, with a special focus on Tuscany, using the tools of anthropology, history, geography, sociology, journalism, and marketing. We'll examine the issues affecting the world's food today, how food production and consumption are changing, and Italy's strategies for protecting its diverse food traditions. We'll use food as a lens through which to deepen understanding of your new home and neighbors for this term in Siena.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES**

1. Increase cultural understanding of Italy through its food.
2. Analyze modern day issues, controversies and strategies in the food world.
3. Use food-related topics to broaden students' critical thinking and communication skills.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY**

Through reading and analyzing current events articles, academic texts, and recipes; discussion; direct observation; tastings and field trips we will apply critical thinking to food and foodways. Lessons will be seminar-style, and therefore an active and dynamic class environment will depend on the participation of all students. Students will be expected to demonstrate understanding and synthesis of the themes covered by contributing to discussions, completing writing exercises and giving presentations.

### **METHOD OF EVALUATION/GRADING**

Students will be evaluated according to class participation, preparedness, periodic brief quizzes, class presentations and 2 papers (4-5 pages each) as follows:

Midterm	25%
Final	25%

Participation (includes attendance, homework, presentations, quizzes, in-class activities, and worksheets) 50%

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

The course will be complemented by on-site visits (as possible):

Chianti Classico winery.

Spannocchia foundation.

Farm of *Chianina* (cattle breed native to Tuscany) or *Cinta Senese* (swine breed native to Siena area).

Pienza and Montepulciano.

Group meal at farm and meeting with a modern-day *massaia* (senior female in Tuscan family).

### **Week 1:**

#### **Food and Culture**

- Selected readings from Counihan, C. & Van Esterik P. (Ed). (1997). *Food and Culture: A Reader*.
- Introduction to Food and Culture. Why is it important to study what people eat?
- Differences in American vs Italian foodways that strike us right away, American expectations of Italian foodways before arrival.
- Food meanings: personal, interpersonal, societal cultural levels. The "omnivore's dilemma": why we have food rules and taboos, and how they evolve.
- Cross-cultural differences and patterns.

### **Week 2:**

#### **Focus on Italy**

- Reading: Capatti, A. & Montanari, M. (2003). *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History*.
- Major points of Italian history and geography, effect on regional foodways.
- Major themes of cuisines, from region to region.

### **Week 3:**

#### **Italian Foodways Continued**

- Reading: *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History* continued
- One Italian food culture, or many?
- Differences and similarities between regions, as well as broad common elements.
- Stasis vs. change.
- The "Mediterranean diet" concept, how it is represented in the media, marketing, and nutrition ideas today.

### **Week 4:**

#### **Italian Foodways Continued**

- Seasonal eating and food preservation methods embedded in Italian foodways.
- Ingredients, preparation methods and dishes that change according to the time of year.
- Eating home-made products. *In-class tasting*.
- Italy's major quality products: History, production and tasting techniques.

## **Week 5:**

### **Food Issues Today, in Italy and in the World at Large**

- Reading: Pollan, M. (2008). *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*.
- Who is growing and producing food today: small vs large production and distribution. The issues behind "organic", "OGM free" and "local".
- Supermarkets vs small stores. Market culture and product sourcing. City vs country.
- Changes in production, buying, and eating habits. What is Quality? Buono, pulito e giusto. How important is tradition in determining quality?

## **Week 6:**

### **Food Issues Continued**

- Reading: Petrini, C. (2007). *Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean and Fair*.
- Strategies for protecting "quality" and food diversity. Regional products: the advent of DOP, DOC, DOCG. Slow Food's presidia.
- Regional products and localism as a marketing strategy.
- Italy's answer to contemporary food issues: Slow Food here and around the world. Its strategies: education, product protection.

## **Week 7:**

### **Food Issues Continued**

- *Student presentations:* Analyzing "food protection" strategies. *Video presentation:* Analyzing the image and myths of Italian food in Italy and abroad by the media and marketing.

## **Week 8:**

### **Focus on Tuscany**

- Reading: Counihan, C. M. (2004). *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence*.
- Tuscan foodways in geographical, historical and socio-economic context: the mezzadria and cucina povera.
- Folklore, food-centered customs.
- Differences and similarities across Tuscany: key themes and important products.

## **Week 9:**

### **Tuscan Foodways Continued**

- Reading: *Around the Tuscan Table:* continued Gender roles, family and food. Siena and Terre di Siena.
- The role of food in Contrada culture. Important sweets, Cinta Senese, Pecorino di Pienza.

## **Week 10:**

### **Italian Food Abroad & Immigrants and Food in Italy**

- Reading: Levenstein, H. (2002). *The American Response to Italian Food, additional newspaper articles (see bibliography)*.

- Italian emigration and Italian food's assimilation and firm establishment in other food cultures abroad. Case study: USA.
- Immigrants to Italy and their role in the production of food, Case study: Rosarno.

## **Week 11:**

### **Immigrants and Food in Italy Continued**

- Protectionism, Case study: Lucca. Americanization and McDonald's. What about food in Italy makes it "resistant" or not to outside cuisines?
- Case studies: McItaly, Altamura.
- Presentations and discussion of students' final papers.

### **COURSE READINGS AND SELECTED REFERENCES:**

Capatti, A. & Montanari, M. (2003). *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Counihan, C. M. (2004). *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Counihan, C. & Van Esterik P. (Ed). (1997). *Food and Culture: A Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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Fisher, I. (2006, January 12). Well-bread Italians expel Big Macs. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from:  
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Lawrence, F. (2004). *Not On the Label: What Really Goes into the Food on Your Plate*. London: Penguin.

Levenstein, H. (2002). The American Response to Italian Food: 1880-1930. In Counihan, C. M. (Ed.), *Food in the USA: A Reader* (pp. 75-90). New York, NY: Routledge.

Montanari, M. (2004). *Food is Culture*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Petrini, C. (2007). *Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean and Fair*. Rizzoli Ex Libris.

Pollan, M. (2008). *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Pollan, M. (2006). *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History in Four Meals*. London: Penguin. (2010, January 14).

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