

## **Food as Culture: Eating in Social Context (Credits: 4)**

Sociology 297FS Spring 2018; T/R 10:00a-11:15; Location: Machmer E-37

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Office hours (934 Thompson): to be arranged at class

**Overview.** During the last century, there have been remarkable changes in what Americans consume that have drastically altered the landscape of how we think about food and eating. These changes have not simply been a matter of quantity. We eat out in restaurants more, and in particular, patronize more fast-food restaurants, and consumers are offered larger portion sizes than past generations. We eat together as families less often than in decades past. Or do we? Is it possible that perhaps what has changed is *how* we eat with family – as families themselves have changed? It is known that on average, food needs to travel further to reach our homes as Americans have become accustomed to “seasonless” consumption. There are fewer unadulterated foods on grocery store shelves. Our eating patterns are linked to a range of food decisions that nowadays typically require a significant amount of information awareness. These include choices between multiple sources of high-energy but low-nutrient sugar on the shelves of the supermarket, choices between organic and nonorganic produce, or choices between farm-raised, humanely-treated, or industrially processed, mass-produced meats. All of these foods might travel from the neighboring town or halfway around the globe to reach us.

A central tenet of nutrition research is that our food choices are largely determined by nutritional need. *But this isn't a nutrition class.* This is a *sociology class*, and one of the main ideas of this class is that there are considerable social forces at work behind how, and what, we eat. Some of these are obvious, some of them less so. For instance: early childhood learning of taste preferences and taste aversion mechanisms, the broad array of choices facing consumers in their local food aisles and restaurants, and changes in prices over time. In short, we adopt our tastes for so many other reasons than nutritional content. Think about availability, cost, religious guidelines, short-term diets for health purposes, and cultural beliefs. Not to mention that our relationships with others influence what we eat, whether in the context of the family dinner table, a friend's choice of a lunch spot, or the workplace (or college) cafeteria. We're constantly learning about ways of eating from people around us. We know from numerous studies that the presence of friends and family affects what food – as well as how much of it, and how – we consume. Furthermore, one's socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural background all contribute to the cultures of food that one is exposed to.

**Goal:** You should leave this course with an ability to think critically about how, and what, you eat is shaped by a wide range of social forces. Although genes and biology may be responsible for some part of the foods you prefer to eat, tastes for food are enacted and reinforced in the social context in which you live. Your job as a member of the class is to be relentlessly curious about how this might work. An equally important goal is to continue to develop skills *that will transfer beyond this course*: a) evaluating the quality of evidence on scientific claims about food and eating, b) interpreting data (in many forms) about food, and c) writing/reflecting about social science research on food and culture.

**Grading.** This course uses Moodle to facilitate active learning, and it will reward consistent engagement with the material and with your classmates. Letter grades will be used (A: 93-100, A-: 90-92.9, B+: 87-89.9, B: 83-86.9; B-: 80-82.9; C+: 77-79.9; C: 73-76.9; C-: 70-72.9; D+: 67-69.9, D: 60-66.9, F: 0-59.9). You have multiple ways to excel; the grade consists of: 20% reading memos (13 of them – I'll drop the lowest one); 20% in-class midterm (multiple-choice & short-answer); 30% final exam; 15% *active* attendance; 15% homework (2 assignments), 10% quizzes (two of them). For all written assignments (response papers/homework), a full letter grade will be deducted for every day it's turned in late. There is no grading curve.

**Prerequisites.** You are expected to come to class *having read* the material so we can talk about it. There are no formal prereqs besides an active curiosity for the topics; a willingness to read material across the social sciences (mostly sociology, psychology), and some public health; and a willingness to engage with data presented in a variety of ways. You'll encounter a variety of data and diverse kinds of (mostly) qualitative and (some) quantitative methods.

**Brief check-in.** Every student is required to sign up for a 10-minute office hour meeting with me during the first 2 weeks. This is a small class – we'll all get to know each other. You'll learn that I take my job seriously. It helps me if I know more about your interests in the course material, and if there are ways that I can help you learn. (Pro tip: *it helps you too*. It's easier for professors who their students to write letters of recommendation for them for a job or scholarship opportunity. Think ahead.)

**Readings.** There are 2 required books. The remainder are primary-source (original) scientific journal articles, and a few short films. I think you'll find the course material challenging but rewarding – staying on top of the readings and engaging in class will help you get the most out of class. PDFs of readings and links to the films are available on Moodle. **ORDER BOOKS EARLY FROM YOUR PREFERRED BOOKSELLER SO THAT YOU DON'T FALL BEHIND.**

- DeSoucey, Michaela. *Contested Tastes: Fois Gras and the Politics of Food*. 2016. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Julier, Alice. *Eating Together: Food, friendship, and inequality*. 2013. University of Illinois Press. NOTE: this is also available as a free e-book through UMass libraries. Link [here](#).

### **What I expect of you:**

Active attendance (15%). Showing up is mandatory, and this is as much a discussion-based small class as it is me lecturing. Each student is allowed one absence, no reason necessary. Get in touch if you have extenuating circumstances, and we'll work together to find a solution.

Homework assignments (15%). There will be two of these, one during the first half of the term (due Feb. 20), one during the second half (due April 12). Details will be provided during class.

Short reading memos (20%). Each week, you have a set of readings that touches on a particular theme. Your task is to write a short (250-300-word) response statement that summarizes a key point of an chapter/article(s) and offers some of your original thoughts and reactions to it(them). What struck you as surprising? What challenged your previous thinking on the topic? Do you disagree with the author(s)? Does this connect to ideas you learned elsewhere? You have a lot of flexibility here, by design. Memos must be uploaded to Moodle prior to the class session about which you're writing to receive credit.

### Exams.

a) In-class midterm (20%). This 70m in-class exam on March 8 will be a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions intended to test your grasp of key ideas from the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the term.

b) The comprehensive final exam (30%) will be weighted towards post-spring break material. Details will be provided during class.

Class norms: I have a “no technology in class” policy – this means no laptops, tablets, phones, etc. I've designed our sessions together as interactive, discussion-based lectures. It sounds old-fashioned, but taking notes, asking questions, and reviewing notes in preparation for exams are the best predictors of *deep learning* in college coursework. I'm happy to point you towards numerous pieces of research that show this to be the case.

## **What you can expect from me:**

To help co-create a constructive learning environment. This means being knowledgeable, prepared, and willing to puzzle through questions prompted by the material. It means helping us to take stock of where we've been each week, and where we're headed the following week. It also means being as responsive to your concerns as I can be.

To be available to you outside of class. I'll take a poll in class as to the best times for office hours and I'll set that time according to what works best for **your** schedules. *This is because I want these office hours to be helpful for you.* You can email, call, or stop by my office. If you email, you can usually expect a response within 24h. I check email about 2x/day during the week. I'm not on Facebook.

To be transparent and clear about how you are being evaluated during the term. I want you to be apprised at all times about how you're doing in the class. This syllabus gives you an overview of how your grade is calculated. I will be providing additional grading rubrics for response papers during the semester. You can check your grade at any time on the Moodle website, or email me. I will also post a grade calculator spreadsheet in the "class documents" folder on Moodle so you can forecast what your grade will be if you were to get a [X] grade on assignment [Y].

### **Week 1 (January 23 & 25): Cultures of Eating in America**

**Q: What is “culture”? What is a “typical” American diet? What does a good diet look like? How has what (and how) we eat changed during recent years? Where does our idea of a “meal” come from?**

*Tuesday:*

Spillman, L. 2002. “Introduction: Culture and cultural sociology.” *Cultural sociology*, pp.1-9.

Berry, Wendell. 2009. “The pleasures of eating.” *Bringing it to the Table: On Food and Farming*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press. pp. 227-234.

*Thursday:*

Simmel, Georg. 1997. “Sociology of the meal.” In *Simmel on Culture*, edited by Michael Featherstone David Frisby, pp. 130–136. London: Sage Publications.

Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 2014. “Inside the extreme sport of competitive eating.” *Contexts*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 26-31

\*\*\* Elias, Norbert. 1978. “On behavior at table.” *The Civilizing Process*. pp. 72-87 (quotes from 16-19<sup>th</sup> century manners books); 89-92 (discussion of changes); 103-109 (knife/fork origins).

### **Week 2 (January 30 & Feb 1): Taste & food cultures**

**Q: How do we think about “taste”, and where do our tastes for food come from?**

*Tuesday:*

Berezin, M. 2015. “Sociology of Culture.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, V.5, pp. 617-621.

Brillat-Savarin, J.A., 1825. “Meditation 2: On Taste.” *The Physiology of Taste: Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, trans. MFK Fisher, New York, *Everyman’s Library*, pp. 44-58.

Drewnowski, Adam, and Pablo Monsivais. “Taste and food choices.” *Present Knowledge in Nutrition, Tenth Edition* (2012): 1027-1042.

*Thursday:*

\*\*\* Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. “The Habitus and the Space of Lifestyles”, pp. 168-200, *Distinction : a social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Freedman, J. and Jurafsky, D., 2011. “Authenticity in America: Class distinctions in potato chip advertising.” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies*, 11(4), pp.46-54.

### **Week 3 (February 6 & 8): Food, Social Space, Race, & Place**

**Q: How is what we eat affected by where we come from?**

*Tuesday:*

Rozin, Paul. 1996. “Sociocultural Influences on Human Food Selection.” Ch. 9 In *Why We Eat What We Eat: The Psychology of Eating*, edited by Elizabeth D. Capaldi. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp: 233-263.

Baumann, Shyon, Michelle Szabo, and Josée Johnston. “Understanding the food preferences of people of low socioeconomic status.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* (2017): 1-24.

*Thursday:*

\*\*\* Charron-Chénier, Raphaël, Joshua J. Fink, and Lisa A. Keister. 2017. “Race and Consumption: Black & White Disparities in Household Spending.” *Soc. of Race and Ethnicity* 3:1, pp.50-67.

Film: *Food Forward: Urban Agriculture Across America* (2014, 25m, Kanopy Streaming)

(NOTE: \*\*\* suggests you give this piece extra time to read and understand.)

#### **Week 4 (February 13 & 15): Food economies & measurement**

**Q: How do the material resources that we have access to shape what we consume? How do we measure food intake?**

*Tuesday:*

- Darmon, N., Drewnowski, A., 2015. "Contribution of food prices and diet cost to socioeconomic disparities in diet quality & health: a systematic review & analysis." *Nutr. reviews*, 73(10), 643-60.
- Fielding-Singh, Priya. 2017. "A Taste of Inequality: Food's Symbolic Value across the Socioeconomic Spectrum." *Sociological Science* 4: 424-448.

*Thursday:*

- Daniel, Caitlin. "Economic constraints on taste formation and the true cost of healthy eating." *Social Science & Medicine* 148 (2016): 34-41.
- Bowen, Sarah, Sinikka Elliott, Joslyn Brenton. "The Joy of Cooking and Other Cooking Lies." *Contexts*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 20-25.

\*\*\*February 20: Assignment 1 Due\*\*\*

#### **Week 5 (February 20 & 22): Eating together, Part I.**

**Q: Why do we eat with other people?**

- Julier, Alice P. 2013. *Eating Together: Food, Friendship, and Inequality*, Ch. 1-3. University of Illinois Press. (for Tuesday)
- Julier, Alice P. 2013. *Eating Together: Food, Friendship, and Inequality*, Ch. 4-6. University of Illinois Press. (for Thursday)

#### **Week 6 (February 27 & March 1): Eating together, Part II.**

**Q: How do you affect what other people eat, and vice versa?**

*Tuesday*

- Bove, Caron F., Jeffery Sobal, and Barbara S. Rauschenbach. 2003. "Food choices among newly married couples: convergence, conflict, individualism, and projects." *Appetite* 40:25-41.
- Polivy, J. and Pliner, P., 2015. "'She got more than me'. Social comparison and the social context of eating." *Appetite*, 86, pp.88-95.

*Thursday*

- Paddock, J., Warde, A., & Whillans, J. 2017. The changing meaning of eating out in three English cities 1995-2015. *Appetite*, 119, 5-13.
- \*\*\* Pachucki MA, Jacques PF, Christakis NA. Social network concordance in food choice among spouses, friends, and siblings. *American journal of public health*. 2011;101(11):2170-7.

#### **Week 7 (March 6 & 8): Food morals**

**Q: How is food a moral and political issue (preview)?**

*Tuesday:* \*\*\* In-class midterm \*\*\*

*Thursday:*

- DeSoucey, M., 2016. *Contested Tastes: Foie Gras and the Politics of Food*. (Preface, Chapter 1)
- Singer, Peter. 1980. "Utilitarianism and vegetarianism." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*: 325-337.

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**Week 8 (March 13 & 15) – No class, spring break**

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**Week 9 (March 20 & 22): Food morals**

*Tuesday:*

DeSoucey, M., 2016. *Contested Tastes: Foie Gras and the Politics of Food*. Princeton University Press.  
(Chapters 2-3)

*Thursday:*

DeSoucey, M., 2016. *Contested Tastes: Foie Gras and the Politics of Food*. Princeton University Press.  
(Chapters 5-6)

**Week 10 (March 27 & 29): Omnivores, vegetarians, and everything in between**

***Q: How are our choices in plant and animal-based products shaped by our ethics, morals, taste, and our wallets?***

*Tuesday:*

Ruby, Matthew B. 2012. "Vegetarianism. A blossoming field of study." *Appetite* 58:141–150.

Cherry, Elizabeth. 2006. "Veganism as a cultural movement: A relational approach." *Social Movement Studies* 5:155–170.

*Thursday:*

Reed, John Shelton. 2004. "Barbecue Sociology: The Meat of the Matter." In *Cornbread Nation 2: The United States of Barbecue*, edited by Southern Foodways Alliance and Lolis Eric Elie, pp. 78–87. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Elias, Norbert. 1978. "On behavior at table." *The Civilizing Process*. pp. 99-103 (meat consumption).

Gomes Costa Filho, Ricardo. "meat masculinity." *Contexts* 13.3 (2014): 56-58.

**Week 11 (April 3 & 5): Eating out**

***Q: How is eating outside the home influenced by the social world?***

*Tuesday:*

Leschziner, Vanina. 2007. "Kitchen stories: Patterns of recognition in contemporary high cuisine." *Sociological Forum*. Vol. 22. No. 1.

\*\*\* Esparza, Nicole, Edward T. Walker, and Gabriel Rossman. "Trade associations and the legitimization of entrepreneurial movements: Collective action in the emerging gourmet food truck industry." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 43, no. 2\_suppl (2014): 143S-162S.

*Thursday:*

\*\*\* DeSoucey, Michaela, and Daphne Demetry. "The dynamics of dining out in the 21st century: Insights from organizational theory." *Sociology Compass* 10, no. 11 (2016): 1014-1027.

Frame, Edward. 2015. "Dinner and Deception." *New York Times*. August 22, 2015.

## **Week 12 (April 10 & 12): Eating and health**

**Q: What kinds of social origins do diet inequalities have? What are some of the social consequences?**

*Tuesday:*

- \*\*\* Pan, An, Qi Sun, Adam M. Bernstein, Matthias B. Schulze, JoAnn E. Manson, Walter C. Willett, and Frank B. Hu. 2011. "Red meat consumption and risk of type 2 diabetes: 3 cohorts of US adults and an updated meta-analysis." *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 94:1088–96.
- Thorndike, A.N., Bright, O.J.M., Dimond, M.A., Fishman, R. and Levy, D.E., 2017. Choice architecture to promote fruit and vegetable purchases by families participating in the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): randomized corner store pilot study. *Public health nutrition*, 20(7), pp.1297-1305.

*Thursday:*

Hawkes, C., Smith, T.G., Jewell, J., Wardle, J., Hammond, R.A., Friel, S., Thow, A.M. and Kain, J., 2015. Smart food policies for obesity prevention. *The Lancet*, 385(9985), pp.2410-2421.

Film: *That Sugar Film: How Sugar Has Infiltrated our Diet and Culture (2014, 90m, Kanopy Streaming)*

\*\*\*April 12: Assignment 2 Due\*\*\*

## **The Future of Food & Society**

### **Week 13 (April 17 – NO CLASS PATRIOT’S DAY & April 19): Food, biology, and genetics**

**Q: How does our biology play into what we eat?**

Rozin, Paul, and Deborah Schiller. "The nature and acquisition of a preference for chili pepper by humans." *Motivation and emotion* 4.1 (1980): 77-101.

\*\*\* Adam, Tanja C., and Elissa S. Epel. 2007. "Stress, Eating and the Reward System." *Physiology and Behavior* 91(4): 449-458.

Sorokowska, A., Pellegrino, R., Butovskaya, M., Marczak, M., Niemczyk, A., Huanca, T. and Sorokowski, P., 2017. "Dietary customs and food availability shape the preferences for basic tastes: A cross-cultural study among Polish, Tsimane'and Hadza societies." *Appetite*, 116, pp.291-296.

### **Week 14 (April 24 & 26): How does technology affect our relationship with food?**

*Tuesday:*

Wansink, B. and Sobal, J., 2007. "Mindless eating: the 200 daily food decisions we overlook." *Environment and Behavior*, 39(1), pp.106-123.

Nguyen, Q.C., Meng, H., Li, D., Kath, S., McCullough, M., Paul, D., Kanokvimankul, P., Nguyen, T.X. and Li, F., 2017. "Social media indicators of the food environment and state health outcomes." *Public Health*, 148, pp.120-128.

*Thursday:*

Turkle, Sherry. 2011. "Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other." New York: Basic Books. (*Short excerpt*).

Kalantarian, H., Alshurafa, N., Le, T. and Sarrafzadeh, M., 2015. Monitoring eating habits using a piezoelectric sensor-based necklace. *Computers in biology and medicine*, 58, pp.46-55.

### **Week 15 (May 1): At this point, you’ve learned how the social world affects what we eat. How does what we eat affect our societies?**

Film: *Food Choices: How our Diet Affects the Environment (2016, 90m)*

## **UMass Amherst statement on academic honesty**

[http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/academic\\_policy](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/academic_policy)

All members of the University community must participate in the development of a climate conducive to academic honesty. While the faculty, because of their unique role in the educational process, have the responsibility for defining, encouraging, fostering, and upholding the ethic of academic honesty, students have the responsibility of conforming in all respects to that ethic.

Intellectual honesty requires that students demonstrate their own learning during examinations and other academic exercises, and that other sources of information or knowledge be appropriately credited. Scholarship depends upon the reliability of information and reference in the work of others. Student work at the University may be analyzed for originality of content. Such analysis may be done electronically or by other means. Student work may also be included in a database for the purpose of checking for possible plagiarized content in future student submissions. No form of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitating of dishonesty will be condoned in the University community.

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

- Cheating - intentional use or attempted use of trickery, artifice, deception, breach of confidence, fraud and/or misrepresentation of one's academic work
- Fabrication - intentional and unauthorized falsification and/or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise
- Plagiarism - knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials
- Facilitating dishonesty - knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty, including substituting for another in an examination, or allowing others to represent as their own one's papers, reports, or academic works

Sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible.

Formal definitions of academic dishonesty, examples of various forms of dishonesty, and the procedures which faculty must follow to penalize dishonesty are contained in the Academic Honesty Policy.

The policy can also be found in the Code of Student Conduct, available on the Dean of Students web site.

If you are charged with a violation of the policy, you have the right to appeal. Appeals must be filed within ten days of notification by the Academic Honesty Office that a formal charge has been filed by an instructor who suspects dishonesty. Information on the appeals process is also contained in the Academic Honesty Policy. Appeals are filed in writing with the Academic Honesty Office. Finally, more information about the policy can be found at the Faculty Senate's Academic Honesty Page or the Writing Program's Avoiding Plagiarism page.



**Accommodations and Services For Students:** Disability Services provides a wide variety of services to students with disabilities. Our office promotes the empowerment of people with disabilities and their full integration into campus life and the community.

**Accommodations:** An accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, service, job, activity, or facility that enables a qualified student or employee with a disability to participate equally in a program, service, activity, or employment at the University. A “reasonable” accommodation refers to an accommodation that is appropriate as well as effective and efficient, and is agreed upon by the University and the consumer with a disability. Many accommodations are available at the University to ensure that students with disabilities participate fully in academic and student life. They provide a student with a disability equal access to the educational and co-curricular process, without compromising essential components of the curriculum. Accommodations are determined on an individual basis, based on the student’s documentation. For accommodations to be timely, they must be arranged well in advance. Students are responsible for contacting Disability Services at the beginning of each semester so that reasonable accommodations can be made in a timely manner (first two weeks of classes, or first week of summer or winter session).

**Common Accommodations For Students:** most frequently provided include, but are not limited to:

- Additional time to complete assignments
- Alternate Formats for Printed Course Materials
- Alternate Types of Exams
- Assistive Technology
- Captioning Services Classroom Access Assistants
- Document Conversion
- Extended Time on Exams
- Extension of Statute of Limitations
- Exam Proctoring
- Learning Specialists
- Modification of Graduation Requirements
- Note-Taking Services
- Paratransit Services
- Prepared Materials Before Class
- Reduced Course Load
- Sign Language Interpreters and Oral Transliterators
- Tape Recorders

### **Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Relationship Violence at UMass**

As a faculty member I have the responsibility to report any incident of sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence or stalking to the UMass Title IX Coordinator. Students can also contact the Title IX office directly at [eod@admin.umass.edu](mailto:eod@admin.umass.edu) if you want to make a report, file a complaint, find out about resources and/or accommodations. Other resources include the Title IX webpage <http://www.umass.edu/titleix/> and the Sexual & Relationship Violence Resource Guide [http://www.umass.edu/titleix/sites/default/files/documents/sexual\\_violence\\_resource\\_guide-09-15.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/titleix/sites/default/files/documents/sexual_violence_resource_guide-09-15.pdf)