First Year Seminar: Feeding the Future

Course Description
How is what we eat connected to how we understand our past, present, and future? Food is often at the heart of narratives about the formation and preservation of key societal institutions such as the family or national identity, as well as human’s relationship with nature. More recently, food has been the subject of a host of TV shows, documentaries, and policy conversations about how to balance convenience, efficiency, and tasty foods with health, equity, and sustainable production. In this course, we examine both historical and contemporary controversies and developments to investigate how food generates social relations, structures of power, economies, ecologies, and ontological realities. We look to an array of marketing campaigns, social movements, and government initiatives, asking how does producing and eating food have material and symbolic consequences for building solidarity among social groups (such as families, clans, voluntary associations, and religious communities) as well as creating hierarchy and distinction within such groups? Through the reading and analysis of primary source documents, ethnographic, historical, and other social scientific accounts, we reflect on the myriad ways food shapes our local communities and global society at large.

Learning Objectives
In addition to exposing students to the course content centered on the social scientific analysis of food production, consumption, and other food practices, the course objectives are to help students develop analytical and persuasive communication skills in reading, writing, and speaking contexts. The course also emphasizes the development of research skills – from developing a research question, gathering and analyzing primary and secondary source documents, and developing conclusions based on our analysis of evidence. Students are expected to dedicate time outside of class to engaging with course reading and developing their independent research projects.

Academic Integrity
All students are expected to produce their own original work in compliance with the NYU academic integrity policy. https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

Disability Services
Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
**Required Texts:**


All other readings are available through Bobcat or NYU Classes.

**Grading Breakdown**

**In-Class Participation/Attendance (10%)**

All students are expected to attend all classes prepared to participate and actively engage with our course materials. In-class discussion and participation is enormously critical for supplementing your independent reading and will greatly affect your ability to develop your research project and paper. Due to the importance of attendance, students are permitted two unexcused absences; 0.5% will be deducted from the final grade for every absence after the first two. An excused absence is only granted with provided documentation of a medical emergency.

**Weekly Reading Responses (15%)**

Students are required to post a weekly reading response on NYU Classes based on the week’s readings by Sunday night at 6pm. The response should be between 300-400 words, and include a summary of the readings’ key points and at least two questions that the readings provoked in relation to the course themes. Each response will be graded based on the student’s ability to synthesize the text’s main argument, ideas, and significance.

**Independent Research Paper and Presentation (65% · further breakdown below)**

Students will be responsible for conducting a semester long research project based on a topic of their choosing. Breakdown is as follows:

1. **Research Proposal (15%) – Due in Week 4.** Students will write a four page proposal based on a chosen food trend, controversy, or phenomenon. In the proposal, students will define a research question and the methods they will employ in order to address the question. Methods should include the analysis of primary and secondary source documents as well as an ethnographic component. Students are required to come to office hours by the third week of class to discuss their ideas. A sign up sheet will be provided to sign up.

2. **Annotated Bibliography (15%) – Due in Week 8.** Students will complete an annotated bibliography with seven sources related to their topic of interest, up to two sources can be taken from the course syllabus.

3. **Food in the City Mini Ethnography Paper (20%) – Due in Week 12.** Students will write a four-page paper based on observations made on a visit to a site in the city related to their research topic.
4. **Final Paper (25%)**– Students will integrate their findings in a 10 page final paper. A first draft will be due in class in Week 14. We will conduct a workshop of the papers in Week 15 where students will share feedback on each other’s work. The final draft and presentation will be due in Week 16.

**Late Policy**
All assignments will be marked down by 5% for each day late. Assignments will not be accepted more than one week late without proof of a documented medical emergency.

**Course Outline:**

**Unit 1: Introduction and Methods**

**Week 1**
- Course Overview and Introduction

**Unit 2: Food and Nation Building**

**Week 2**


**Week 3**


**Unit 3: Food and Globalization**

**Week 4**
- Introduction, Ch. 1-2 in Mintz, Sidney. 1986. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. xv-xxx and 3-73

**Week 5**
Week 6


Unit 4: Food as Distinction

Week 7


Spring Break (March 16-22)

Unit 5: Food and Social Movements

Week 8


**Unit 6: Ethical Consumption**

**Week 10**


**Week 11**


Isenhour, Cindy. On Conflicted Swedish Consumers, the Effort to “Stop Shopping” & Neoliberal Environmental Governance. *Journal of Consumer Behavior* Special Issue on Anti-Consumption and Sustainability 9(6): 454-469.

**Unit 7: Food and Animals**

**Week 12**


**Week 13**


Week 15 Final Paper Workshop

Week 16 Final Presentations