

Anthropology 110: The Anthropology of Food

“A five-meal course” – Fall 2009

Instructor: Adam Van Arsdale
Lecture: Tuesday, 6:30-9:00
Office: PNE 348

Office Hours: Wednesday: 1-3,
Friday: 10-11, and by appointment
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Course Description:

The Anthropology of Food is meant to serve as an introduction to both the Wellesley College community and the discipline of Anthropology through the engaging topic of food. The course will provide an overview of the theoretical ways in which the topic of food can be addressed from an anthropological perspective. We will examine the role food plays in shaping identity, gender construction, and the co-evolution of human food practices and society. The seminar will also incorporate a variety of different learning experiences from ethnographic research on Wellesley dining culture, a field trip to a local farm, research into pre-historic food practices, a personal food log, and the preparation and consumption of several meals throughout the term.

Texts:

- Food and Culture: A Reader, 2nd ed., Carole Counihan & Penny Van Esterik, eds. (2008). Routledge Press
- Food, the Body, and the Self, Deborah Lupton (1996). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Near a Thousand Tables, Felipe Fernandez Armesto (2003). Free Press
- The Omnivore's Dilemma, Michael Pollan (2006). Penguin

Grading:

- Course Assignments (8), 10% each
 - Eight different assignments will be spread across the term. These assignments will vary in their focus and content. These will include a personal food essay, a group mini-research project and presentation on a prehistoric food culture, a write-up of a class trip, an ethnography on Wellesley eating practices, a personal eating log, a family recipe project, short article summaries, and a comparative analysis of the seminar's meals. More details on these assignments will be disseminated throughout the semester.
- Attendance and participation, 20%

First Class:

The First Class site for this course will serve as the primary means of out-of-class communication as well as a storage location for course resources. An introduction to the site and its resources can be found on the main page of the conference. A conference for out of class discussion can also be found on the site.

Course Goals:

- Familiarize yourself with the community, setting, resources, and practices of Wellesley College
- Become familiar with the basic concepts, theory, and sub-disciplines of anthropology (Ethnology, Archaeology, Biological Anthropology)
- Develop an appreciation for the role of food in society and a knowledge of some of the ways in which food is influenced by and influences our lives
- Have fun!

Concerns:

If you have any concerns regarding your ability to complete the assignments of the course or trouble understanding specific concepts, I am always available for consultation. In addition to my office hours I can be reached with regularity via e-mail (please only call my cell phone in case of emergency). Assistance is also available for students through the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center. All work in this class is subject to the Wellesley Honor Code. While students are encouraged to discuss the course materials and assignments both in and out of class, all of your work must reflect your own independent efforts. All assignments must be turned in on time. Unless approval is granted from Prof. Van Arsdale, no late assignments will be accepted. No extra credit will be available for this course. Much of the material for this class is cumulative in nature – ***please contact me early if you feel yourself falling behind!***

WEEKLY SYLLABUS (subject to change)

"Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are."
-- Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826)

Week 1: (Sept. 7-11) Introduction/What is Anthropology?

Tuesday, September 8 – Introductions to each other, Wellesley, Anthropology and eating

Readings:

- Pollan, Introduction (1-11)
- Lupton, Ch. 1 (6-36)
- Reader, #4 Mary Douglas (44-53)

* Meal #1 – Global average food consumption *

Week 2: (Sept. 14-18): Food and Evolution

Tuesday, September 15 – The beginnings of food, the beginnings of humanity

Readings:

- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 1 (1-20)
- Wrangham, "The raw and the stolen" (CA, 1999, 567-594)*

Assignment #1:
Personal food essay

Week 3 (Sept. 21-25): Food and the Origins of Civilization

Tuesday, September 22 – Intensification, domestication and agriculture

Readings:

- Fernández-Armesto, Chs. 3-4 (55-100)
- Larsen, “Biological changes in human populations with agriculture” (ARA, 1995, 185-213)*

* Meal #2 – Eating around an open fire *

Week 4 (Sept. 28-Oct. 2): “Modern” Eating

Tuesday, September 29 – Contemporary culinary and food production processes

Readings:

- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 8 (187-224)
- Pollan, Part I (15-122)
- Reader #31, Alice Julier (482-499)

Assignment #2:

Prehistoric food culture w/presentation

Week 5 (Oct. 5-9): Food Today: Where, What, When

Tuesday, October 6 – The modern business of food

Readings:

- Pollan, Part II (123-276)
- Reader #32, Yunxiang Yan (500-522)
- Reader #24, Alison Leitch (381-399)

* Meal #3 – Eating locally *

Week 6 (Oct. 12-16): Food and Labor

Tuesday, October 13 – Production, consumption, and food labor

Readings:

- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 6 (131-162)
- Reader #28, Eric Schlosser (441-451)
- Reader #29, Deborah Barndt (452-466)

Class Field Trip (TBD)

Week 7 (Oct. 19-23): Food as Cuisine

Tuesday, October 20 – The construction of identity through food

Readings:

- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 6 (131-162)
- Reader #8, Sidney Mintz (91-103)
- Reader #19, Richard Wilk (308-326)
- Reader #21, Psyche Williams-Forsen (342-353)

Assignment #3:

Write-up of farm visit

Week 8 (Oct. 26-30): Food as Ritual

Tuesday, October 27 – Food as an agent of cultural construction

Readings:

- Lupton, Ch. 5 (131-153)
- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 5 (101-130)
- Reader #10, Caroline Walker Bynum (121-140)

Week 9 (Nov. 2-6): Food Choice

Tuesday, November 3 – Why do we eat the foods we do?

Readings:

- Lupton, Ch. 4 (94-130)
- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 5 (21-54)
- Reader, #5 Marvin Harris (54-66)

Assignment #4:

Wellesley dining ethnography

Week 10 (Nov. 9-13): Food and Health

Tuesday, November 10 – Why identifying “good” foods can be so difficult

Readings:

- Reader #1, Margaret Mead (17-27)
- Reader #9, Hilde Bruch (104-120)
- Eaton, “The ancestral human diet” (PNS, 2006, 1-6)*
- Liburd, “Food, Identity, and African-American Women With Type 2 Diabetes: An Anthropological Perspective” (DS, 2003, 160-165)

* Meal #4 – Fast food eating *

Week 11 (Nov. 16-20): Food and the Body

Tuesday, November 17 – If we are what we eat, how come I’m not covered in orange Dorito fuzz?

Readings:

- Lupton, Ch. 3 (68-94)
- Reader #12, Susan Bordo (162-186)
- Reader #13, Fabio Parasecoli (187-201)

Assignment #5:

5-day food log writeup

Week 12 (Nov. 23-27): Food, Family and Gender

Tuesday, November 24 – Mothers, kids and kinship

Readings:

- Lupton, Ch. 2 (37-67)
- Reader #16, Marjorie DeVault (240-258)
- Reader #17, Christopher Carrington (259-288)

Week 13 (Nov. 30-Dec. 4): Food and Ecology

Tuesday, November 30 – How do our food needs shape our environment?

Readings:

- Fernández-Armesto, Ch. 7 (163-186)
- Pollen, Part III (277-411)
- Reader #34, Jennifer Clapp (539-553)

Assignment #6:
Family food recipe

Week 14 (Dec. 7-11): Food as Feast

Tuesday, November 24 – Celebration!

* Meal #5 – Class potluck *

Assignment #7, #8:
Comparative analysis of class meals
Article summaries due