

**Department:** NUSC

**Course No.:** 1167 [166]

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** Food, Culture and Society

**Contact:** Hedley Freake

**Content Area:** CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism

**Diversity:** CA4 International

**Catalog Copy:** NUSC 1167. Food, Culture and Society. Second semester. Three credits. Lammi-Keefe

Social, cultural, historical and economic factors influencing food intake and behavior and nutritional status. Historical and contemporary topics, including world events affecting food choices and problems, the beginning of agriculture in the Middle East, cultural influences on eating habits in the U. S., vegetarianism and space age foods.

**Course Information:** The goal of this course is to expose students to other cultures and to explore food habits and behaviors of those cultures. Students will gain an appreciation for how world history, economics and geography have shaped food habits of different populations around the world. The objectives are to:

- i) introduce students to divergent food habits that are rooted in other cultures;
- ii) help students understand how beliefs, world history, and geography have contributed to the establishment of food habits in other cultures;
- iii) help students gain an understanding for both the diversity of food habits in the U. S. and the influence of other cultures on our own food habits; and
- iv) have students actively explore another culture and its foods during the course.

There is a required text with reading assignments that complement the lectures. Quizzes are scheduled at approximate two week intervals and with a midterm and final scheduled according to the university exam schedule for these exams. Quizzes and exams are all multiple-choice. An ethnic meal assignment requires the student to either interview an individual from a culture with which they have little familiarity or to dine at an ethnic restaurant that represents a culture with which they have limited familiarity. For the interview the students are provided with a guide of questions related to culture, food habits and beliefs, etc. The students receive a grade for this assignment based on a report that is handed in (not to exceed five double- spaced typed pages). An optional assignment for extra credit is a book report. The book must be a book that provides substantial information on a culture or a time period and its food. Prior approval by the instructor of the book is required.

The major themes, issues and topics that are covered are: a historical overview of food across the millennia from how agriculture and food habits have evolved over time from the beginning of

agriculture in Mesopotamia to the space age foods that today permit prolonged space flight; many different cultures around the world are explored to reveal how history, beliefs and geography have molded food habits (e.g., Asians, Southeast Asians, Middle Easterners, Scandinavians, Central Europeans, Africans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans); and how food habits in the U.S. have been shaped by both the first settlers and then continuous immigration with its cultural influences.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed.**: NUSC 166 meets the goals of General Education by providing exposure and study of other cultures, with a look at how a culture's history, religious beliefs, geographical location and so forth have molded their food habits over time. From this course students will gain an appreciation for and sensitivity to other cultures, their histories and their influence on the world, including the U.S. Through this course an intellectual curiosity for students about other peoples and their culture will be launched.

**CA4 Criteria:**

- 1.** This course emphasizes the experiences and beliefs of other cultures and the link of these to the food habits and food symbolism that have evolved for each culture, with a look at diversity within cultures. The student is introduced to the beliefs attached to different foods in different cultures. For instance, the Chinese have a heavy reliance on herbs for healing while for Hindus cattle are sacred.
- 2.** Both similarities and differences for cultures vis-a-vis food habits are contrasted. For example, rice as a food staple plays a role in the diets of Mexicans, Middle-Easterners and Asians. While in China, the peoples of the south rely almost exclusively on rice as a carbohydrate source while those in the northern parts rely very heavily on corn. For many cultures religious beliefs, while the beliefs may differ, provide a guide for food consumption and behaviors.

This course both focuses on issues of diversity outside of the U.S. and on cultural continuities and transformations over time and place.

**1)** Diversity outside of the U. S. is addressed from the standpoint of food availability and food choices for stratified populations, e.g., the Ancient Egyptians had a class system that determined diets and access to food; China has an acknowledged class system that makes its peoples/tribes on the perimeter of the country comprise underclasses with the restricted privileges, including food access, that tends to characterize the underprivileged and underserved on a world-wide basis; in China, with its enormous land mass, there is great diversity in the peoples, their beliefs and food habits from north to south and east to west of the country-- Chinese food is simply not just Chinese food. The examination of food and food habits from Mesopotamia to modern times demonstrates clearly cultural continuities that have emerged contrasted against the transformations that accompanied the passage of time and the migration of peoples. The cultural continuities and transformations are demonstrated for different countries where the student gains an appreciation for the fact that in some countries there has been much continuity over time, whereas others, such as the U. S., have witnessed transformations from one decade to the next. Also there is the perspective that oftentimes there is some continuity even in the midst of great change-- take for example the reliance on comfort foods during times of stress, personal, national or global.

**Role of Grad Students:** A graduate assistant will be assigned to assist with this course. The duties will include one to two lectures per semester, proctoring of quizzes and exams and assistance with grading the ethnic meal assignment. The GA will be supervised by the instructor of the course.