

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Prague

Course Code / Title: (PR/CLTR 245) Food and Culture: Czech and Global Perspectives

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Cultural Studies / History, Central European Studies, Anthropology, Sociology

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: None

Description

When we source, prepare, and consume foods we transform the products of nature into culture, but what is guiding these practices? How can an understanding of food practices enrich our experience abroad? This course serves as an introduction to food studies, placing special emphasis on food and beverages in Czech culture. Topics include the roles food plays in European history and in empires, and the way foodways are involved in ethnic identity, memories, and relationships with the landscapes that sustain physical and cultural thriving. We also analyze local and global trends in food processing and gastronomy. Interdisciplinary aspects from fields such as those history and memoirs, literature, economics, and environmental studies enrich the anthropological perspective. There are field trips to Sapa, the Vietnamese culture and culinary center of Prague, and to the Staropramen brewery and the microbrewery Pivovarský dům, as well as a hands-on cooking class with a Czech chef.

Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students:

- Apply theoretical and historical models to Czech and other food cultures
- Encounter mass-produced and home-cooked Czech foods and learn about Czech beer brewing and the Moravian wine culture
- Use food-related topics to broaden critical thinking and communication skills
- Bring an expanded understanding of the choices, dilemmas, and human stories involved in what we eat into their daily lives

Course Requirements

This course includes in-class lectures and:

1. On-site visits to relevant sites, such as the hub of Prague's Vietnamese community (where they will experience a Vietnamese café, grocery stores, a Buddhist temple, and a restaurant where they can taste the distinctive North Vietnamese cuisine; a tour of Prague's Staropramen brewery and a microbrewery; visits to a mall food court and a farmers' market;
2. In-class and on-site tastings of Czech foods;
3. An experience cooking a traditional meal under the guidance of a Czech chef

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Active participation is expected in this course. Students are expected to attend each class and field study course components, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students are expected to read all assigned materials before the relevant class session and come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussions. Reading assignments are generally about 30 pages per class session.

Graded assignments include:

- FDAs (Food Diary Assignments): Reflections on experiences with Czech food and drinks
- Quizzes: There are three quizzes with five questions each. These inquire about the main theories presented by authors and ask for supporting evidence. A study slide is provided before each quiz.
- Five presentations on issues or topics assigned to them by the instructor are required. These include: periods in European food history; a “food empire”; an ersatz food; a food commodity; and a contemporary issue in Czech food culture.
- Final paper and presentation: 8-10 pages on a topic determined in consultation with the instructor. Two out of the ten points are for a written proposal, and 3 are given for the project outline, both of which are required in order to proceed to the next step. A ten-minute presentation with slides is an integral part of the final project and is graded separately.
- Final examination: The final examination includes questions that solicit critical reflections on topics covered throughout the semester as well as personal experiences encountering Czech foods in the context of the development of the local cuisine.

Grading

Structured class discussion of local food experiences (including written FDA reflections)	20%
Quizzes (3 @ 10% each)	30%
Student Presentations (group projects) (5 @ 3% each)	15%
Final Paper	15%
Final Presentation and Slides	5%
Final Examination	15%

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Readings

Belasco, Warren. "Identity: Are We What We Eat?" and "The Drama of Food: Divided Identities" In *Food: The Key Concepts*. New York: Berg, 2008.

Collingham, Lizzie. *The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.

De Silva, Cara (ed.). *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezín*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996.

Fraser, Evan D.G., and Rimas, Andrew. *Empires of Food: Feast, Famine and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations*. New York: Free Press, 2010.

Geist, Edward. "Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the 'Book about Healthy and Tasty Food'". *Russian Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (April, 2012), 295-313.

Goldstein, Darra. "Women under Siege: Leningrad 1941-1942" in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*. Avakian, Arlene V., and Barbara Haber (eds.) Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.

McGovern, Patrick. *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Revised edition, 2013.

Mintz, Sidney. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985.

Sahlins, Marshall. "The Original Affluent Society" in *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays*. New York: Zone Books, 2000.

Valgenti, Robert T. "Ungrounding Terroir." In *East Asian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol 1, No. 2. 2022, 41-58.

Watson, James L., ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Wilson, Bee. *Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud, From Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

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Additional Resources

Graeber, David, and Wengrew, David. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. New York: Macmillan, 2021.

Moss, Michael. "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food" in New York Times. February 20, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/magazine/the-extraordinary-science-of-junk-food.html?_r=0

von Bremzen, Anya. *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking: A Memoir of Food and Longing*. Danvers, MA: Crown Publishing. 2013.

Wrangham, Richard. *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Outline of Course Content

Topic 1: Welcome to Food Studies

- Discussion of class format and expectations
- Czech mores, manners, and culinary culture
- Food regions of the Czech Republic
- Introducing *terroir* – the taste of the land – and a tasting of local breads and honeys

Topic 2: The Czech Cornucopia

- The Nový Smíchov (mall) food court and shopping tips
- The Holešovice farmers' market
- Discussion of Czech groceries and street foods

Topic 3: Food and Empires

- Why "food empires" arise and how they function
- Student presentations on individual empires
- The Ancient Greek symposium: theory and practice

Topic 4: Topics and Periods in European Food History

- The Columbian Exchange
- The Spice Trade
- Food and Social Class
- The Twentieth-Century Food Industry
- Early Standards for Food Safety

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Topic 5: Communism

- Communist culinary ideals and their reflection in architecture
- Standard Soviet and Czech cookbooks and historical food availability
- Tuzex stores
- Unofficial provisioning from WWII until 1990
- Student presentations on ersatz foods

Topic 6: Food and Memory; Food and Trauma

- The siege of Leningrad and women's resilience
- The cookbooks of Terezin
- Ersatz foods during times of shortage
- Food and dining during the Covid-19 lockdowns

Topic 7: Food Commodities

- Sydney Mintz: *Sweetness and Power* – sugar as a global commodity (lecture)
- Student presentations of other food commodities
- Traditional Czech sweets – lecture and tasting of traditional Czech baked goods
- Seasonal feasts: St. Martin's and St. Huberts Days and Czech Easter (lecture)

Topic 8: Contemporary Issues in Czech Food

Student presentations on:

- The EU and its Incentive Structures
- Organic Agriculture and its Discontents
- Czech Consumer Preferences
- Trends in the New Millennium in Czech Gastronomy

Topic 9: The Vietnamese Minority in Czechia

- Field visit to Sapa, including a Vietnamese café, a family restaurant, and grocery stores