

CLUSTER PROGRAM PROPOSAL: FOOD CULTURES

Summer 2009

Submitted by Inger S.B. Brodey and Marcie Cohen Ferris

RATIONALE:

Why consider food in the great canon of analysis of world cultures? How can foodways---the study of food and culture---stand alongside venerable disciplines like anthropology, folklore, geography, history, literature, music, and sociology, fields whose scholars have long studied culture and community? The answer is simple. Food is embedded within each of these fields of study. It is the edible secret of cultural studies.

While food has always been essential to the canon of cultural studies, few recognized its importance as a distinct field of study. The cultural processes associated with food---production, regulation, representation, identity, and consumption---took on aliases such as agriculture, animal science, civil rights, consumption, decorative arts, domesticity, drink, economy, exchange, garden, horticulture, hunger, malnutrition, marketplace, nutrition, obesity, pottery, poverty, property, reform, segregation, slavery, starvation, sustenance, terroir, trade, and wealth. Food is omnipresent---entangled in forces that have shaped world history and culture for centuries. When we study food, we unveil a web of social relations defined by race, class, ethnicity, gender, and shifting economic forces.

The academic study of food is rapidly growing at American universities as agronomists, anthropologists, economists, folklorists, geographers, historians, literary scholars, nutritionists, public health faculty, and sociologists explore the field. Yale University offers nineteen food and agriculture courses---up fifty percent from five years ago. Indiana University recently announced a new Ph.D. program in the anthropology of food---the first program of its kind in the world. UNC faculty in American Studies, Anthropology, Comparative Literature, English, Folklore, Geography, History, Nutrition, Sociology, and the Honors' program regularly examine the cultural history and significance of food in their courses. And the opportunities are not limited to UNC: Students take courses in food writing and "the politics of food" at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies; North Carolina State University's programs in agriculture and food science have taught generations of students about food. There might be additional opportunities related to APPLES teaching as well.

But rather than introduce food studies as a distinct discipline, this cluster would allow students to take courses related to food in a number of different disciplines, providing them with the opportunity to integrate their understanding of food cultures across disciplines. We find that Food Cultures is particularly well suited for a cluster because it includes courses from the Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and even an Internship. Below please find a list of courses that are regularly taught at UNC, which we propose to include in the cluster.

COURSE LIST:

- AMST 375 "Cooking Up a Storm: Food in American Culture," Marcie Cohen Ferris

- AMST 390 “No Place Like Home: Material Culture of the American South,”
Marcie Cohen Ferris
- ~~ANTH 151 “Anthropological Perspectives on Food and Culture”~~
- ANTH 252 “Prehistoric Foodways”
- CMPL 255 “The Feast in Philosophy, Film, and Fiction,” Inger Brodey
- GEOG 232 “Agriculture, Food, and Society”
- GEOG 434: “Cultural Ecology of Agriculture, Urbanization, and Disease
- ENST 207: “Internship in Sustainability”
- HONORS 352: “What’s Dinner? Toward Understanding an Endangered Species,”
Jim Ferguson

CORE/ GATEWAY COURSE:

We would like to offer two possible core courses, depending on a student’s interest: either AMST 375 or GEOG 232. That way, students can enter the cluster through either the Humanities or the Natural Sciences.

Please let us know what additional information you need for our application.

Best regards,

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Marcie Ferris-Cohen, American Studies