

# **Anthropology 110: The Anthropology of Food**

## *“A five-meal course” – Fall 2012*

**Instructor:** Adam Van Arsdale  
**Lecture:** PNE 351,  
Tuesday 6:30-9:00  
**Office:** PNE 348

**Office Hours:** Tuesday: 11-12,  
Friday: 1-2, 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. As a part of the First-Year Seminar program and the newly initiated Maurer Public Speaking Initiative, the course will have several additional goals that go beyond the anthropological content of the course and focus on development as a proactive, engaged and critical learner.

### **Texts:**

- Food and Culture: A Reader, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Carole Counihan & Penny Van Esterik, eds. (2008). Routledge Press
- Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History, Sidney Mintz (1986). Penguin Books
- The Omnivore's Dilemma, Michael Pollan (2006). Penguin Books
- **optional** The Emergence of Agriculture, Bruce Smith (1998). Scientific American Lib.

### **Grading:**

The course will include a series of small projects throughout the semester, progressing from group work to individual work. These assignments are also constructed to expose each student to different learning resources on campus, including the Clapp Library, on-line tools and your peers. In addition to these assignments, regular participation and engagement with the course materials in class and online will be expected from each student. As a FYS course and in order to encourage uninhibited academic exploration, the course will be graded as a mandatory credit/non section. Additionally, evaluations of student performance in the course will be based on a combination of evaluations from Prof. Van Arsdale and student self-evaluations. The aim of this approach is to make each student aware of their own responsibilities with respect to the work they produce, as well as provide a deeper perspective on each individual's strengths and weaknesses as a learner. (Assignment appendix attached\*)

**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 taught at Wellesley College (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 influences and is influenced by our lives
- Improve your skills as a learner, including your ability to publicly communicate your thinking in oral, written and visual formats

**Google Site:**

This course will utilize Google Sites as an online forum for communication outside of the classroom. In addition to a hosting location for course materials (project assignment sheets, syllabus, select readings), the site will provide an outlet for dynamic course communication. The site includes a blog for which everyone in the class is a co-author. This blog will be a place for students to share responses about course readings prior to class in order to facilitate in-class discussions, as well as a place for students to share food experiences and thoughts that take place outside of the class itself. This might include thoughts on Wellesley College/town of Wellesley food culture, links to interesting food/anthropology related on-line content, or general musings relating to the broad topics of the course. The course blog is also intended as a place to encourage informal writing as a way of improving your writing ability. The course site can be found at: <https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/anth-110-fall-2012/>.

**Off-Campus activities:**

Throughout the semester we are likely to have a few off-campus, out of classtime activities (e.g. trip to local farm, out of class meal). I will schedule these as early as possible in order to minimize potential conflicts, but will accomodate arrangements for unavoidable conflicts.

**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. 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. ***Please contact me early if you feel yourself falling behind or are uncertain about your ability to complete the required coursework!***

## 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. 3-7): Introduction/What is Anthropology?***

Tuesday, September 4 – Introductions to each other, Wellesley, Anthropology and eating

Readings:

- Pollan, Introduction (1-11)
- Reader, #4 Mary Douglas “Deciphering a Meal” (44-53)

\*\* Meal #1 – Global average food consumption \*\*

### ***Week 2 (Sept. 10-14): Food Origins***

Tuesday, September 11 – Evolutionary perspectives on food and food origins

Readings:

- Wrangham, “The raw and the stolen” (CA, 1999, 567-594)

\*Assignment #1: Personal food essay, 2-minute presentation

### ***Week 3 (Sept. 17-21): Food and the Origins of Civilization, part 1***

Tuesday, September 18 – Technology, food and society

Readings:

- Smith, Chs. 1-3 “In search of origins,” “Creating new plants and animals,” and “New technology and the search for agricultural origins” (1-48)
- Larsen, “The agricultural revolution as environmental catastrophe: Implications for health and lifestyle in the Holocene” (*Quaternary International*, 2006, 12-20)\*

\*\* Meal #2 – Eating around an open fire \*\*

### ***Week 4 (Sept. 24-28): Food and the Origins of Civilization, part 2***

Tuesday, September 25 – The origin of “modern” eating practices

Readings:

- Smith, Ch. 4 “The fertile crescent” (49-90)
- Pollan, Part I “Industrial – Corn” (15-122)

\*Assignment #2: Prehistoric food culture w/powerpoint presentation

### ***Week 5 (Oct. 1-5): Food Today: Where, What, When***

Tuesday, October 2 – The modern business of food

Readings:

- Mintz, Ch. 1 “Food, sociality and sugar” (1-18)
- Pollan, Part II “Pastoral – Grass” (123-276)
- Reader #32, Yunxiang Yan “Of hamburger and social space: Consuming McDonald’s in Beijing” (500-522)
- Reader #24, Alison Leitch “Slow food and the politics of pork fat: Italian food and European identity” (381-399)

**Week 6 (Oct. 8-12): Food and Labor**

Tuesday, October 9 – NO CLASS, FALL BREAK

Readings:

- Mintz, Ch. 2 “Production” (19-73)
- Reader #28, Eric Schlosser “The chain never stops” (441-451)
- Reader #29, Deborah Barndt “Whose ‘choice’? Flexible women workers in the tomato food chain” (452-466)

\*\*Class Field Trip (TBD)\*\*

**Week 7 (Oct. 15-19): Food as Cuisine**

Tuesday, October 16 – The construction of identity through food

Readings:

- Reader #19, Richard Wilk “Real Belizean food: Building local identity in the transnational Caribbean” (308-326)
- Reader #21, Psyche Williams-Forsen “More than just the ‘big piece of chicken’: The power of race, class, and food in American consciousness”(342-353)
- Reader #26, Dylan Clark “The raw and the rotten: Punk cuisine” (411-422)

\* Assignment #3: Write-up of farm visit

\*\* Meal #3 – Eating locally \*\*

**Week 8 (Oct. 22-26): Food as Ritual**

Tuesday, October 23 – Food as an agent of cultural construction

Readings:

- Mintz, Ch. 4, “Power” (151-186)
- Reader #10, Caroline Walker Bynum “Fast, feast and flesh: The religious significance of food to Medieval women” (121-140)

**Week 9 (Oct. 29-Nov. 2): Food Choice**

Tuesday, October 30 – Why do we eat the foods we do?

Readings:

- Mintz, Ch. 5, “Eating and Being” (187-214)
- Reader, #5 Marvin Harris “The abominable pig” (54-66)

\* Assignment #4: Wellesley dining ethnography

**Week 10 (Nov. 5-9): Food and Health**

Tuesday, November 6 – Why identifying “good” foods can be so difficult

Readings:

- Reader #1, Margaret Mead “The problem of changing food habits” (17-27)
- 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. 12-16): Food and the Body***

Tuesday, November 13 – If we are what we eat, how come I'm not covered in orange Dorito fuzz?

Readings:

- Reader #12, Susan Bordo “Anorexia nervosa: Psychopathology as the crystallization of culture” (162-186)
- Reader #13, Fabio Parasecoli “Feeding hard bodies: Food and masculinities in men’s fitness magazines” (187-201)
- Reader #31, Alice Julier “The political economy of obesity” (482-499)

\* Assignment #5: 5-day food log writeup

***Week 12 (Nov. 19-23): Food, Family and Gender***

Tuesday, November 20 – Mothers, kids and kinship (Thanksgiving week, FILM)

Readings:

- Reader #16, Marjorie DeVault “Conflict and deference” (240-258)
- Reader #17, Christopher Carrington “Feeding lesbian families” (259-288)
- Quinlan et al., “Local resource enhancement and sex-biased breastfeeding in a Caribbean community” (*Current Anthropology*, 2005, 471-480).

***Week 13 (Nov. 26-Nov. 30): Food and Ecology***

Tuesday, November 27 – How do our food needs shape our environment?

Readings:

- Pollen, Part III “Personal – the Forest” (277-411)
- Reader #34, Jennifer Clapp “The political ecology of food aid in an era of agricultural biotechnology” (539-553)

\* Assignment #6: Family food recipe write-up, presentation

***Week 14 (Dec. 3-7): Open topic***

Tuesday, December 4 – Topic and readings chosen by students

\* Assignment #7: Class reading list

***Week 15 (Dec. 10-14): Food as Feast***

Tuesday, December 11 – Celebration!

\*\* Meal #5 – Class potluck \*\*