

GLI 201 ITALIAN FOOD AND CULTURE - SP26

Instructor: Jessica Mancini (soul.food.philosophy@gmail.com) and Alessandro De Filippo (alex@yprusa.com)

Learning Facilitator: Francesca Tripodi, support@borromini.institute

Credits: 3

Contact hours: 45

Offered: Winter

Language of instruction: English

Prerequisites: none

UIUC Articulation: To be discussed with your University of Illinois Academic Advisor

Dates: varies

Open to all majors and minors for general elective credit. Recommended for students in Food Studies, Italian Studies, Sustainable Food Systems.

Keywords: localized food networks, wine, olive oil, viticulture, food culture, food history, food-scapes, food and spaces, foodways, regional identities, sustainability models, micro-cuisines

Course Description:

This course will provide an in-depth exploration of the interplay between landscape, agricultural practices, and the cultural history that defines Italy's culinary identity. The course will commence with an exploration of food production and its relationship with the natural environment, focusing on the intersection of sustainable land management and cultural heritage. Students will engage directly with local agriculture through site visits to a biodynamic farm and a natural winery. These immersive experiences will offer firsthand insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with alternative food production methods in Italy.

In parallel, students will participate in a series of lectures and discussion groups that delve into the historical, cultural, and culinary factors that have shaped Italy's food culture. The course will give particular attention to three cornerstone elements of Italian cuisine: bread, wine, and olive oil. Through a combination of field trips, food labs, and discussions, students will gain a thorough understanding of the production methods, supply chains, and consumption practices surrounding these iconic foods, both historically and in the contemporary context.

The second part of the course will pivot to an exploration of value chains and supply networks within Italy's food system. By engaging in hands-on experiences, students will develop a deeper understanding of the role that marketplaces and informal food networks play in Italian foodways. At the same time, the course will explore the fundamental role food plays in community-building, social regeneration, and social justice.

In the final portion of the course, students will move into the kitchen for practical culinary sessions led by local experts. These workshops introduce traditional Italian gastronomic techniques—including regional cooking methods, preservation practices, and pasta making—while also encouraging reflection on Italy's modern history. Discussions will consider how industrialization and globalization have influenced Italian

foodways, transforming culinary traditions while simultaneously inspiring movements toward revitalization and sustainability.

Course goals:

- Students will explore how Italian food practices are shaped by regional landscapes, cultural heritage, and community values, and how these elements contribute to local identities.
- By integrating insights from history, anthropology, agriculture, and environmental studies, students will build a holistic understanding of how food systems function and evolve.
- Students will examine issues such as social justice, community resilience, and equitable access within Italian food networks, evaluating how food can serve as a tool for social and environmental regeneration.
- Through research projects and experiential learning, students will practice analyzing complex food-related issues and proposing informed, sustainable responses to contemporary challenges.

Critical thinking outcomes:

- Develop meaningful questions to address economic and social problems or food related issues.
- Gather, interpret, and evaluate relevant sources of information (magazine, policy makers, historians, food producers' data, surveys about food topics, food business plan, company briefs...).
- Reach informed conclusions and solutions (make connections between history, economy and Italian food practices).
- Consider analytically the viewpoints of self and others (people from different food cultures).
- Students will begin to understand how their lives are shaped (defining their personal food culture and identity) by the globalized world in which they live.
- Students will understand that their food practices have social, economic and environmental consequences.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing the course will be able to:

- **Identify** the key historical, cultural and regional influences that have shaped Italian cuisine
- **Distinguish** between global industrialized food products and locally produced artisanal foods, demonstrating understanding through comparative analysis and relevant examples
- **Explain and assess** the significance of EU food certifications (e.g., DOP, IGP), the challenges posed by climate change, and the role of sustainable agricultural practices in shaping contemporary Italian foodways.
- **Design, conduct, and present** research that examines how food production and consumption practices contribute to the preservation of Italian culinary heritage, regional identity, and biodiversity, applying ethnographic research methods and critical analysis.

Expectations

You will be expected to discuss course readings in class and prepare short written assignments including reactions to the readings. Proof read your work before you submit it.

Take notes (and make sketches if you like) from the lectures and the sites that we visit to draw from for your assignments.

All work in the class will be based on **lectures**, videos, **readings** and **on-site presentations**. Stay close and stay alert. Ask questions.

All work must be completed on time. Permission for any late submissions must be requested to the instructor at least 24 hours before the deadline.

Attendance and Participation

Being a student in Rome is a wonderful experience but prioritizing all courses is a must. Attendance is required and will be taken at the beginning of lectures and site visits. This includes program excursions which are all mandatory.

Assigned readings must be completed prior to the weekly seminar and students must arrive prepared to discuss and/or write about them.

Much of the course will take place on site with thematic visits to parts of the city where the themes discussed in the lectures and readings can be observed.

Students are allowed no more than 2 unexcused absences; after the 3rd absence the grade will decrease by 1/2 letter grade or 5% per absence.

Unexcused absences include injury and illnesses that do not require medical attention; therefore, while it is your choice to skip class to travel or spend time with a guest who is visiting, you may regret that choice if you later become ill and have already used up your allowed absences. If you experience prolonged illness that will adversely affect your attendance, you will be asked to provide documentation of the illness and a plan approved by the instructor for making up for the missed work.

As soon as you know you will not be attending a class for whatever reason you are responsible for informing both your instructor and Learning Facilitator.

Class Organization

Notes on on-site lessons

The course will use *experience-centered* approaches to the subject matter, and active participation by the students will be an essential element of the course.

Much of the course takes place outside the classroom. Visits to markets, tastings of specific food products, both artisanal and mass-produced, will fuel discussions of food's social and cultural significance in Italy. These notes are to help students get the most out of the unique field learning experience:

- Arrive at the assigned meeting place early; we cannot wait for late-comers.
- Stay close and stay alert. Ask questions.
- Take notes and maintain sketches from the lectures and the sites that we visit to draw from for your assignments.
- Students will be required to have all the needed material with them, including the right clothes for outdoor visits.

During the visits the students will need the following material/items:

- Map, meeting address and suggested bus route. Don't forget your monthly bus card
- Comfortable walking clothes and shoes
- Bottle of water
- Depending on the weather, umbrella and rain boots /sunscreen, hat, sunglasses
- When visiting church: no shorts or short skirts, no tank top
- Notebook with rigid cover, pen

During the onsite classes students will be provided with audio headsets. All students are responsible for the integrity and safety of their own headset and headphones. The audio-guides must be returned to the professor at the end of the class.

A note on "Critical Field Studies"

At the Borromini Institute we use 'critical field studies' to refer to courses where considerable time is spent observing and participating in activities in the 'field.' We recognize this as a distinct method of learning and one quite distinct from normal classroom activities. It requires students to be active learners, and to seek out learning opportunities often while working with or observing local people or specialists. Such opportunities are often explored with other members of the student group in research or ethnographic projects. Projects give students the opportunity to grasp the significance of behavior occurring in a second culture and to situate it using the best available ideas in today's academy.

In the same way, we encourage our students to always carry a notebook and to use it to take notes or draw sketches whenever confronted by unusual behavior. Increasingly students are taking advantage of digital ways to record and edit local culture. Indeed, it is not unusual for students to present digital portfolios at the end of courses as part of their assignments.

Our courses are 'critical' in the sense that we ask students to study the way the world "is" but also to think about or design how it "might be" or "should" be. This argument goes beyond a "value neutral" position and suggests that we have created ourselves – and our world – in the Anthropocene era and bear responsibility for our collective future. It is, indeed, 'our world' and its future is in our hands.

Communication

The professor is always available during and after class to answer questions and can be contacted by email for additional feedback or clarification. Emails will be answered within 24 hours, and usually more quickly, unless otherwise indicated. To request an appointment to speak in person or video-conference send an email indicating the issue and possible times.

First-name basis is welcome but there is an expectation of professional tone in verbal and written communication. Salutation and sign-off are required in emails (essential to determine the intended recipient and sender) and avoid emojis and slang. Check your spelling and grammar before submitting any written work, including an email to your professor. (It's a good habit to get into now).

Learning Facilitator

Students may also reach out to the Learning Facilitator to discuss general matters related to the course. The Learning Facilitator is available to provide practical support as well as assist students should any misunderstandings emerge in relation to their academic courses. For instance, any needs related to learning accommodations, drop/add period, or attendance policy should be taken up directly with the Learning Facilitator.

The Learning Facilitator is not a Teaching Assistant and as such cannot provide personal assistance related to course content.

First Amendment Protection

Gustolab International/Borromini Institute supports and upholds the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech and the principle of academic freedom in order to foster a learning environment where open inquiry and the vigorous debate of a diversity of ideas are encouraged. Students will not be penalized for the content or viewpoints of their speech as long as student expression in a class context is germane to the subject matter of the class and conveyed in an appropriate manner.

Non-Discrimination, and Anti-Harassment Policy

Gustolab International/Borromini Institute is committed to a work environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity; discrimination and harassment of any form are strictly prohibited, as better explained in the Student Handbook.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic violation and should be taken seriously. One is responsible for plagiarism when: the exact words of another writer are used without using quotation marks and indicating the source of the words; the words of another are summarized or paraphrased without giving the credit that is due; the ideas from another writer are borrowed without properly documenting their source.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Per Gustolab International/Borromini Institute policy and in compliance with the home university's policies, students with a documented disability are required to communicate their academic accommodations and subsequently provide **official written documentation**. They are entitled to, and will receive, reasonable academic accommodations to ensure their ability to successfully participate in and complete this course. Such students must make an appointment during office hours to discuss any such disability with the instructor, and are responsible for bringing to the instructor's attention any accommodation needs prior to or early in the term.

Pass/Fail (UIUC)

Students can request their grades to be pass/fail after they come back from their semester. This process differs from college to college, but it is always something that the student is responsible for. Gustolab International/Borromini Institute will report grades as normal and the student needs to work with their academic advisor in their home college for the pass/fail to appear on their record.

Drop/Add (UIUC)

Students should be enrolled in a full-time course load abroad. All students are enrolled in a full-time placeholder while they are abroad, but some colleges/departments will have their own requirements as to if they actually need to complete 12 credits abroad. Many majors do not require this in LAS, but it is part of advice by LAS that a student should always take a full-time course load abroad. Enrollment in specific courses cannot be guaranteed but depends on a minimum enrollment. Students may request to switch courses within the first week of the program and Gustolab International/Borromini Institute will attempt to grant such requests.

Assignments

25% In-Class Multiple-Choice Examination

It is essential that students demonstrate comprehension of the material presented in lectures, assigned readings, and site visits. This examination will assess the extent to which students have mastered this content. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions drawn from the required readings, in-class lectures, and prior site-based learning activities.

30% In-Class Written Examination

This written examination will require students to synthesize course concepts, experiences, and prior knowledge. Students will be expected to present a critical and reflective analysis that demonstrates both a thorough understanding of the course material and the ability to evaluate and interpret key themes with academic rigor.

35% Final Presentation

The final presentation will assess students' ability to accurately and clearly communicate their understanding of the course content. Presentation material may draw upon assigned readings, lectures, previous site visits, and student-led presentations. This assessment will be evaluated for accuracy, clarity, and overall academic precision.

10% Class Participation

Active class participation is an essential component of the course. Students are expected to contribute meaningfully to discussions, engage with peers, take thorough notes inside and outside of class, and complete the required readings with care. Participation grades are not automatic; they are awarded based on the quality and consistency of students' oral contributions to the collective learning environment.

Grading Criteria

The following general criteria will be used when grading all assignments:

1. Research: the degree to which the student demonstrates that the subject matter has been adequately investigated. Grades will be determined by the ability to demonstrate in the assignments that material supports knowledge building by using empirical research –such as field observations–, theory, and practice wisdom.
2. Conceptual Ability: the ability to abstract concepts, think logically and organize ideas into a conceptual whole. Grades will be determined on the basis of the student's ability to move along a continuum from abstraction to concreteness, to deal systematically with material presented in class, in readings and in field observations.
3. Communication: the ability to organize and transmit ideas in written, graphic, and, when appropriate, oral form. Students should strive to use proper syntax; express ideas clearly, punctuate, spell and, where appropriate, employ symbolic and visual modes of communication.
4. Analytical Thinking: the ability to analyze, present and evaluate concepts.
5. Timeliness and Completeness

Final grades are reported at the end of each term in the following way:

- 100% A+ Exceptional; significantly exceeds the highest expectations for undergraduate work
- 95% A Outstanding; meets the highest standards for the assignment or course
- 90% A- Excellent; meets very high standards for the assignment or course
- 85% B+ Very good; meets high standards for the assignment or course

80% B Good; meets most of the standards for the assignment or course
 75% B- More than adequate; shows some reasonable command of the material
 70% C+ Acceptable; meets basic standards for the assignment or course
 65% C Acceptable; meets some of the basic standards for the assignment or course
 60% C- Acceptable, while falling short of meeting basic standards in several ways
 55% D Minimally acceptable; lowest passing grade
 50% F Failing; very poor performance

Course Calendar

This outline is intended merely to present the course and its principle themes. It is subject to variation before and during the semester. Exact meetings will be in the shared calendar.

Classes will be held Monday and Thursday each week

Monday 16-17:30
 Thursday 9.00 -12.00

WEEK	DATE	CONTENT	REQUIRED READINGS
1	12-01 15-01	Lecture: <i>Food, Nature and the Self.</i> TUSCIA FIELD TRIP	Joanes, A. S. (2016). <i>Fresh: sustainable food production in America.</i> Kanopy Streaming https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/171099?vp=tamworthlibrary
2	19-01	Lecture: <i>Agroecology, tradition and culture</i>	Berry W. (2009) <i>Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food.</i> Counterpoint, Berkeley (Excerpts)
3	26-01 29-01	Lecture: <i>Mediterranean food and farming culture.</i> BREAD LAB	Scott, J.C (2017) "Introduction: A Narrative in Tatters: What I Didn't Know" in <i>Against the Grain</i> pp. 1-12 Wrangham, R. W. (2009). <i>Catching fire: How cooking made us human.</i> Basic Books.
4	02-02	Lecture: <i>Greek, Etruscan and Roman food culture</i>	Montanari, M. (2013). <i>'Before there was an Italy there was an Europe' in Italian identity in the kitchen, or food and the nation.</i> Columbia University Press. Pp. 1 - 3 Meneley, A. (2004). Extra virgin olive oil and slow food. <i>Anthropologica</i> , 165-176.
5	09-02 12-02	OLIVE OIL LAB WINE LAB	Daferner, M., Pütz, R., Steiner, C., & Rainer, G. (2025). 'Nature in the glass': Principles and practices in low-intervention winemaking. <i>Applied Geography</i> , 178, 103610.
6	16-02	Multiple-choice in-class exam	
7	23-02 26-02	Lecture: Alternative supply networks in Italy TRIONFALE MARKET TOUR	Smith, G. Berruti, G. (2023). Alternative value chains in <i>The Landscapes of Italian Food: Local Development and Healthy Practices.</i> 10.4324/9781003279914

WEEK	DATE	CONTENT	REQUIRED READINGS
			Steel C. (2013) Market and supermarket in <i>Hungry City: how food shapes our lives</i> . Vintage
8	02-03 06-03	BREAK	
9	12-03	Written in- class exam	
10	16-03 19-03	Lecture: <i>Regionalisation, unification and migration</i> PASTA CLASS	Montanari, M. (2013), The invention of regional cooking, in <i>Italian identity in the kitchen, or food and the nation</i> . Columbia University Press Dickie, J. (2008). Pinocchio hates pizza in <i>Delizial!: the epic history of the Italians and their food</i> . 1st Free Press hardcover ed. Free Press
11	23-03 26-03	Lecture: <i>Industrialization and the economic miracle</i> COOKING CLASS MARCO MARTINI	Dickie, J. (2008) Miracle food in <i>Delizial! The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food</i> . Free Press
12	30-03 02-04	Lecture: <i>Globalisation and gastronativism</i> COFFEE LAB	Parasecoli, F. (2022). <i>Gastronativism: Food, Identity, Politics</i> . Columbia University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/para20206
13	06-04 09-04	NO CLASS Pasquetta and Trip South	
	13-04	Office hours	
14	16-04	Students final presentations	
15	20 -04 23- 04	Office hours Students final presentations	
16		FINALS WEEK	

Course Related Trips

During the program there will be a number of program excursions with components related to each course. Each semester these change depending on the season and general teaching opportunities. Occasionally, short assignments from these field trips will be included in the class participation component of the course grade.

Bibliography

The principal readings this semester are listed below and noted in the course calendar. A digital copy of all required readings will be provided in pdf format. An additional bibliography of suggested and recommended readings is provided below to assist students in their research. Some of these readings will be provided as digital downloads.

Required

Berry W. (2009) *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food*. Counterpoint, Berkeley (Excerpts)

Daferner, M., Pütz, R., Steiner, C., & Rainer, G. (2025). 'Nature in the glass': Principles and practices in low-intervention winemaking. *Applied Geography*, 178, 103610.

Dickie, J. (2008). Pinocchio hates pizza in *Delizia!: the epic history of the Italians and their food*. 1st Free Press hardcover ed. Free Press

Dickie, J. (2008) Miracle food in *Delizia! The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food*. Free Press

Joanes, A. S. (2016). *Fresh: sustainable food production in America*. Kanopy

Meneley, A. (2004). Extra virgin olive oil and slow food. *Anthropologica*, 165-176.

Montanari, M. (2013). 'Before there was an Italy there was an Europe' in *Italian identity in the kitchen, or food and the nation*. Columbia

Montanari, M. (2013), The invention of regional cooking, in *Italian identity in the kitchen, or food and the nation*. Columbia

Parasecoli, F. (2022). *Gastronativism: Food, Identity, Politics*. Columbia University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/para20206>

Scott, J.C (2017) "Introduction: A Narrative in Tatters: What I Didn't Know" in *Against the Grain* pp. 1-12

Smith, G. Berruti, G. (2023). Alternative value chains in *The Landscapes of Italian Food: Local Development and Healthy Practices*. Routledge

Steel C. (2013) Market and supermarket in *Hungry City: how food shapes our lives*. Vintage

Wrangham, R. W. (2009). *Catching fire: How cooking made us human*. Basic Books.