



American Food History

History 3495.431

Fall 2026

Asynchronous Online

Instructional Team

Instructor: Joshua I. Lopez

Office: Wooten Hall A239

Email: Joshua.Lopez@unt.edu

****Please email me using Canvas email***

Zoom Room: <https://unt.zoom.us/j/7778155406>

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:30pm-3:30pm, or by appointment

Teaching Assistant

Miguel Velis

MiguelVelis@my.unt.edu

Office Hours:

About The Course

Course Description

What stories can food tell us? Over the course of the semester, we will consider this question as it relates to American cultural and social history. We will survey several aspects of American food history, especially emphasizing how Americans have thought about food and expressed certain ideas about American identity, citizenship, progress, and health. With this attention towards food's symbolic role in American culture, we will trace the beginnings of American food, the rise of the modern food industry, and how ideas of health and the body have come to define citizenship and belonging in the US.

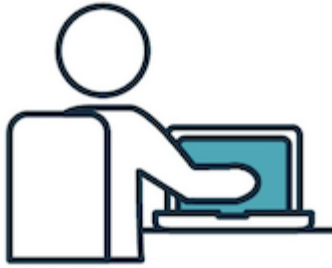
Course Prerequisites or Other Restrictions

There are no prerequisites or other restrictions for this course.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor's discretion. However, any changes I make will not be substantial, and I will communicate fully with you and give you ample time to prepare.





Course Structure

This course is delivered 100% online. The class is also asynchronous. I will make weekly modules available to you at least two weeks in advance, so that you may pace yourself through the course in a manner that suits your schedule and needs. Because we do not have set meeting times, you have a degree of flexibility that is unavailable in the traditional, in-person classroom. You choose when you read and study for the course as long as your assignments are completed by the due date. Successful students in this course, then, must be self-directed and self-motivated. What you take away from the course will be determined by how much time and effort you put into it.

Objectives and Outcomes



History 3495 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

- Explain key aspects of American food history
- Connect American foods' historical contexts to primary sources
- Analyze food and food practices within primary sources
- Synthesize primary and secondary sources to develop new interpretations of American food in the past

Materials



This course uses the three books listed below. I may provide other readings and resources such as handouts, short articles, short videos, links to websites and webpages, and other files via Canvas. You are responsible for accessing these materials. If you need assistance accessing these materials, please contact me or our teaching assistant immediately. Additionally, students will need access to a computer, speakers, reliable internet access, and a word processor, such as Microsoft Word or Google Docs.

- Charlotte Biltekoff, *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health*
- Frank Bruni, *Born Round*
- Megan Elias, *Food on the Page: Cookbooks and American Culture*

Technical Assistance

Part of working in online environments like Canvas involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. Here at UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

UIT Help Desk: UIT Student Help Desk site (<http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm>)

Email: helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940-565-2324

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130

Walk-In Availability: 8am-9pm

Telephone Availability:

- Sunday: noon-midnight
- Monday-Thursday: 8am-midnight
- Friday: 8am-8pm
- Saturday: 9am-5pm

Laptop Checkout: 8am-7pm

Course Requirements and Grading

Assignments

Weekly Reading and Writing Assignments

My goal in this course is to invite students into the process of thinking *with* food. Over the course of the semester, we will read primary and secondary sources, apply food's historical context to our interpretations of sources, and identify new insights about American culture and society through listening to food. This means that reading, writing, and thinking are central to what we do in this class. Advanced-level undergraduate students are expected to complete

weekly reading and writing assignments in a timely manner. The reading and writing requirements may be intensive but I assure you that consistent and genuine engagement with this course will be rewarding.

Weekly Response Papers - 30%

Students will be assigned a total of twelve (12) weekly response papers. Students will be asked to paraphrase and synthesize the week's reading assignments, analyze primary sources, and assess secondary sources. The weekly response papers are meant to provide students an opportunity to comprehend the course content and practice analytical writing in preparation for the Midterm Exam and Final Writing Project.

Food to me... Critical Reflection Papers - 30%

In order to grasp food's power as a source of cultural and social knowledge, we must first defamiliarize ourselves with what we think food is. Oftentimes, food is taken for granted because it is, in some shape or form, a part of our everyday life. We eat to survive. Yet, if we listen closely, food speaks. This semester, students will write two reflection papers where they set out to define food. One reflection will be assigned at the beginning of the semester, and the second at the end. The purpose of this approach is to trace your thinking and learning of food as an analytical lens.

Midterm Exam - 20%

Students will complete a midterm exam that assess their understanding of the course content and readings and their analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Born Round Critical Essay - 20%

This semester, we will read the food memoir, *Born Round*, written by Frank Bruni. We will treat the memoir as a primary source and apply our understanding of the idea of health and food over time to our reading of the memoir. We will do this in order to understand Bruni's experiences of eating, body size, and belonging. The final essay will assess students' ability to place Bruni's memoir in conversation with Charlotte Biltekoff's *Eating Right in America*.

Grades Break Down and Grading Scale

- **Weekly Response Papers:** 30%
- **Critical Reflection Papers:** 30%
- **Midterm Exam:** 20%
- **Born Round Critical Essay:** 20%

Total Percentage Possible: 100%

- **A** = 90%-100%
- **B** = 80%-89%
- **C** = 70%-79%
- **D** = 60%-69%
- **F** = 59% or less

Course Policies

Communication Expectations and Etiquette



During office hours, the instructional team's priority is answering your questions and responding to your emails. If you email us during our office hours, we will respond right away. **Outside of office hours, you may still contact us, but we will respond to emails within a 24-hour period. We may not respond to emails during the weekend.** If you contact us during the weekend, please be aware that we will receive your message, and we will contact you as soon as possible on the following Monday.

When you contact me, the instructor, please email me via Canvas email. Canvas email assists me by sorting my email by class. This helps me to identify which course section students belong to, and I am able to assist you in a timely manner. Please only email me via Canvas email.

Students who do not use Canvas email to contact me may not receive a response from me. An exception to this policy are official university notices from the Dean of Students, UNT's CARE Team, the office of Disability Access, UNT Athletics, and other departments who may be writing on your behalf.

Finally, please note that all communication between students, the instructor, and teaching assistants are considered exchanges between professionals and should be written accordingly. I

will expect all students to communicate in a manner consistent with a professional setting. Professional communication includes using an appropriate greeting, clear and thoughtful language, complete sentences, and a courteous tone. Your emails should clearly state the purpose of the communication and avoid slang, excessive informality, demands, or language that could be interpreted as disrespectful.

Unprofessional communication may result in a request to revise and resend the message and, in repeated or serious cases, may be addressed in accordance with university conduct policies. This policy is intended to help students develop professional communication skills that are essential both in college and beyond.

You may use the example below as a template or guide for composing your own emails.

Example of a Professional Email:

Hi Professor Lopez,

I am writing to you about my grade on the midterm exam. I did not score as high as I hoped, and I wanted to talk with you so that I may understand why I received the score that I did. I have class during your office hours. May you be available some time in the afternoon on Monday or Wednesday? I look forward to your reply.

Best,

Student name

Late Work

Assignments are due on the date and time listed in the course schedule. Each week, a weekly response paper will be due on Sundays by 11:59pm. Major assignments will also be due on their schedule due dates by 11:59pm.

Late work will not be accepted except in cases of documented, extenuating circumstances.

Extenuating circumstances are serious, unavoidable situations that are beyond a student's control, such as medical emergencies, family emergencies, or university-approved obligations. When students are faced with such circumstances, they must notify me as soon as possible and provide appropriate documentation. I will grant approval for late submission on a case by case basis. Approval for late submission is not guaranteed. Documentation is required for approval for late submission.

Technical issues, workload from other courses, work schedules, travel, or forgetting a due date do not qualify as extenuating circumstances. Assignments submitted late without prior approval and documentation will receive a grade of zero.

Academic Dishonesty and AI-Usage

Academic dishonesty, according to UNT's "Student Academic Integrity" policy, includes the intentional and unintentional engagement in cheating, plagiarism, and the facilitation of academic misconduct, to name a few. Students who are suspected to be engaging in such activities may face receiving a failing grade on an assignment, failing the course, or being reported to the dean of students. Cheating and plagiarism include submitting a completely AI-generated response.

I understand that you will use such tools as generative AI in various writing activities both in and out of the classroom. I will therefore support your understanding of the uses, ethics, and limitations of generative AI tools. This technology has many abilities and also limitations; its use requires research skills, critical thinking, and digital literacy. Therefore, if students use generative AI, they will be expected to use it responsibly and transparently. **Students may use generative AI as a tool in the writing process, specifically to brainstorm, research, outline, and edit and proofread assignments.** Students should note, too, that responses generated by AI are not always accurate and they may contain misinformation, incorrect citations, and incomplete references, so students will be required to review, revise, and integrate their own knowledge and skill in order to be considered for the highest score possible.

Students who use generative AI in their assignments must acknowledge their use through citation and annotation. The following is a template for citing your use of generative AI:

Chat-GPT-3 (or name of Generative AI-Tool). (YYYY, Month DD of query). "Text of your query."
Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>.

Additionally, I will expect you to describe in your own words the strategies and techniques you used to compose with AI tools in a descriptive annotation of 2-5 sentences following your citation. **Even if you use Grammarly to proofread your assignment, please provide a citation and brief note as the AI-Detection software cannot distinguish between AI-Generated content and softwares.** Be as specific as possible in your annotation. It is your responsibility to be transparent and proactive. Both citation and annotation are required. Failure to acknowledge your use of AI tools through citation and transparency through a descriptive annotation will result in an automatic 0 for academic dishonesty.

Students in this class may only use generative AI to brainstorm, research, and outline for their assignments as well to proofread and edit their work. Students whose work is flagged for 40% or more for AI-generated content but does not contain the required citation and annotation will result in an automatic 0 for academic dishonesty.

Example of a citation and annotation:

Chat-GPT-3. (2025, May 1). "What is the historical context for Christopher Columbus's voyage journals?." Generated using OpenAI. <https://chatgpt.com/c/695c35d8-ee88-8326-9e1eb97bf5131942>

I asked ChatGPT for help understanding the historical context surrounding Columbus's document. I read its answers and checked for accuracy using American Yawp. Then, I used ChatGPT's response to help me write my historical context section in the essay.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Precolonial Foodways

- **Read:** Christina Gish Hill, "Precolonial Foodways,"; Kelly J. Sisson Lessens, "Grains"; "Corn Plume and Bean Maiden"; Excerpts from Maxi'diwiac, or Buffalobird-woman's *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians, an Indian Interpretation*
- **Watch:** TedTalk, "How Corn Conquered the World"; "Bread From Acorns"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 1

Week 2: Colonial Food Encounters

- **Read:** Rebecca Earle's "'If you eat their food...': Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America"; Excerpt from Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity*
- **Watch:** TedTalk, "The History of Chocolate"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 2

Week 3: Early American Foodways

- **Read:** Rachel B. Herrmann, "Early America"; "The Life of James Hemings: Family, French Cuisine, and Freedom," in Monticello.org/jameshemings; "Thomas Jefferson Request American Food While Living in France"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 3 & Critical Reflection 1

Week 4: African American Foodways

- **Read:** Excerpts from Jessica B. Harris' *High on the Hog*; "Alexander Falconbridge Describes the Food of the Middle Passage"; Excerpts from Harriett Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Excerpts from Henry C. Pettus, Slave Narrative
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 4

Week 5: Thanksgiving, an American Food Tradition

- **Read:** James E. McWilliams, "They Held Their Noses and Ate"; Megan Elias, *Food on the Page* Chapter 1
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 5

Week 6: Food, Industrialization, and Urbanization

- **Read:** Adam D. Shprintzen, "The Nineteenth Century"; Excerpt from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*
- **Watch:** Library of Congress, "New York 'Ghetto' Fish Market"; *The Poison Squad*
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 6

Week 7: The Rise of Domestic Science

- **Read:** Charlotte Biltekoff, *Eating Right in America*, Introduction and Chapter 1; "Catherine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe Advocate for the Training of Housewives"; "Pearl Idelia Ellis Argues That Dietary Reform Can Aid in Assimilation and End Crime"
- **Watch:** TedTalk, "The History of the Graham Cracker"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 7

Week 8: Midterm Exam

- **Assignments:** Midterm Exam

Week 9: Keeping Food Fresh

- **Read:** Hi 'ilei Julia Hobart, "Snowy Mountaineers and Soda Waters: Honolulu and its Age of Ice Importation"; Megan Elias, *Food on the Page* Chapter 2
- **Watch:** TedTalk, Nicola Twilley, "How the Fridge Changed Food"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 8

Week 10: Chinese American Cuisine

- **Read:** Haiming Liu, "Chop Suey as Imagined Authentic Chinese Food"
- **Watch:** Jennifer 8. Lee, "The Hunt for General Tso"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 9

Week 10: Mexican Food Across the US

- **Read:** Excerpts from Southern Foodways Alliance, "Birria and Bluegrass"; Lori A. Flores, "Mexican Restaurants of New York City"; Jeffrey M. Pilcher's "'Old Stock' Tamales and Migrant Tacos: Taste, Authenticity, and the Naturalization of Mexican Food"
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 10

Week 11: Born Round, Part I

- **Read:** Frank Bruni's *Born Round*, Introduction - Ch.2

Week 12: Born Round, Part II

- **Read:** Finish *Born Round*
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 11

Week 13: Eating Right in America

- **Read:** Finish reading *Eating Right in America*
- **Assignments:** Response Paper 12

Week 14: Like an Athlete & Critical Essay

- **Read:** Emily Contois, "Are We Becoming Ivan Drago?"
- **Assignments:** Born Round Critical Essay

Week 15: Food to me now...

- **Read:** Megan Elias, *Food on the Page* Chapter 7

Finals Week: Critical Reflection Paper 2 Due