

ANTH 3890: Special Topics- Food and the Body



(image from the University of Minnesota Community-University Healthcare Center, by [Goodspace Murals](#))

Class Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00-12:15pm

Location: Garland Hall, Room 109

Instructor: Prof. Keitlyn Alcantara

Email: keitlyn.alcantara@vanderbilt.edu

Office: Garland 010 (Basement)

Office Hours: 9:00-10:30 am Tuesday and Thursday *By Appointment* (Schedule [here](#))

Introduction: Each day, we fuel our existence with food. How does a simple thing like what we eat become steeped in politics? Beginning with a biological analysis of food as a form of energy, in this class we will learn about the journey food makes from the land into our bodies, and all the political twists and turns in between. Through the interweaving narratives of indigenous, enslaved African, and immigrant experiences, we will read from scientific papers, creative writing and journalism to understand the history of food inequality in the United States, and its intergenerational health impacts.

This course is organized around the questions:

Why does what we eat matter? How can food be used to reveal structures of inequality? How can food be a site of impactful social change?

This course will provide you with a historical background and biological understanding of current food security and food sovereignty issues. In addition, the course is closely linked to food activism currently taking place in Nashville, allowing you the opportunity to visualize solutions to some of the city's, and nation's most pressing problems. Through semester-long training in ethnographic methods, you will be asked to immerse yourself in a chosen community food issue, producing a final piece that highlights a particular story of embodied food inequality, and the work being done to combat it.

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Course Expectations and Requirements

Participation: This course is heavily based on your participation, as we all learn best when we are invested in learning as a community, and when you find ways to link learning to your own interests. Participation will be measured by one's attendance, and contribution to in-class activities and class discussion. *Be prepared to offer one brief comment and ask one question based on the readings for each day you attend, and bring the readings with you to class.* Anyone who signs the day's attendance sheet may be asked to share their comment and/or question. Discussing issues raised in class with the Professor during their office hours is also a form of participation.

Reading Reflection: Each week will have 4 "reflection leaders" who are responsible for posing the week's core reflections on Brightspace. These reflections should engage deeply with the reading, and inspire points of conversation. The remaining students are "discussants", and must respond to one of the core reflections. Reflection leaders must post 24 hours before class (**by 11 am on Mondays and Wednesdays**), and responders must respond before the beginning of class (**by 11 am on Tuesdays and Thursdays**). Aim for at least 3-4 sentences in length. Two free days are allowed per semester without impacting the grade.

Cooking Day Reflections: This course will include four cooking days, where we will bring theory into practice by engaging with some of the course's themes in the kitchen. A reflection for each is due *one week* from the cooking day, and should touch on the cooking experience, and how it relates to class discussions. One free day is allowed per semester without impacting the grade.

Community Ethnography: This is a project that will take place in different phases throughout the semester, culminating in a final ethnographic project in lieu of a final exam. The focus of this project is to explore one case study of food inequality within our surrounding community, reflecting on its origin, and community responses.

Midterms: There will be two in-class midterms required for this class. They will consist of short answer responses and a short essay. Further detail will be provided prior to the midterm.

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Components of your Grade:

- Participation: 25%
 - In-class participation: 10%
 - Reading reflections: 10%
 - Cooking day reflections: 5%
- Midterm #1: 20%
- Midterm #2: 20%
- Ethnography Project: 35%
 - Part 1: 5%
 - Part 2: 10%
 - Part 3: 15%

The grade scale for midterms and presentations is as follows:

A, 94-100	A-, 90-93	
B+, 86-89	B, 83-85	B-, 80-82
C+, 76-79	C, 73-75	C-, 70-72
D, 65-69		
F, below 65		

Any assignment turned in after the due date will decline by a grade-rank PER DAY (A+ to A, A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) unless a valid exception is cleared with the instructor PRIOR TO the due date.

If a student has personal concerns or foresees any circumstances that require individual accommodations related to grading, participation, attendance, etc., please contact the instructor directly or via an academic advisor within THE FIRST TWO WEEKS of class.

Students are expected to adhere to the Vanderbilt Honor System and should review "The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers" to avoid plagiarism:

[http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system\](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system)

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Course Logistics and Rules:

Use your own words and experiences

This course relies on the [Vanderbilt Honor Code](#). No plagiarism, cheating, or copying are permitted (as defined [here](#)). You are responsible for understanding plagiarism and how to avoid it. Apparent violations will be referred to the Honor Council.

Avoid distractions

Silence cell phones and other electronic devices before entering class. Classroom laptop and tablet use is for taking notes and accessing readings related to this course only (or for accessing brief factual information needed to participate in discussion).

Late assignment policy

Timely completion of assignments is essential for the work of the instructor and provides a measure of fairness to your fellow students. Assignments received late will be subjected to a *penalty of 5% a day up to 20%*. Extraordinary circumstances may justify waiving these penalties on a case-by-case basis.

Incomplete Policy

If you are falling behind at any point in the course, please talk with me about your situation as soon as possible. My door (and inbox) are always open to this conversation; an appeal for help is always preferred over not communicating (“radio silence”) or half-hearted attempts to complete the assigned work.

If some extraordinary circumstance makes it impossible to complete on time, limited extensions may be granted through an incomplete grade at the instructor’s sole discretion. Students requesting an incomplete must provide a timetable for completion of the course requirements before the incomplete is approved.

Accessibility

Students are expected to keep the classroom a place that is welcoming, safe, mutually respectful, and which allows everyone to focus. University policies prohibit harassment of any individual based on sex, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, or disability. If you are uncomfortable attending class due to the behavior of another member of our community, please communicate with the instructor or the department about the issue.

Students with disabilities may receive assistance and accommodation of various sorts to enable them to participate fully in courses at Vanderbilt. To establish the accommodations appropriate for each student, please alert your instructor to your needs. The Disability Services Program provides a wide range of support services to students with disabilities at Vanderbilt University. For more detailed information about our

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services, students with all kinds of disabilities are encouraged to contact DSP, Monday to Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., at (615) 322-4705. Further information is also available at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/ead/ds_students.html

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Course Schedule¹

Required Text:

Bowen, Sarah, Joslyn Brenton and Sinikka Elliott. 2019. *Pressure Cooker: Why Home Cooking Won't Solve Your Problems and What We Can Do About It*. Oxford University Press.

All other reading/listening/watching materials can be found on Brightspace under Content → Readings. **Always bring the readings with you to class.**

Date	Readings	Due
Part I: The roots		
Wk 1 Introduction		
Tues Jan. 7 th	- Syllabus	In class writing: What does it mean to “eat well”? What does it mean to “be healthy”?
Thurs Jan. 9 th	READ: - Pressure Cooker Ch. 1 “Introduction: (Back) To the Kitchen?” - Wolder Levin and Browner. 2005. “The Social Production of Health”	
Wk 2 What do we mean when we say “nutrition”?		
Tues Jan. 14 th	READ: - Armelagos et al. 2005. Evolutionary, historical and political economic perspectives on health and disease.	
Thurs Jan. 16 th	READ: - Pressure Cooker , Ch.4 “By the Book” WATCH: - Energy, Food, and Us	Due: Office Hours Introductory Visits
Wk 3 You are what you eat, but can you help it?		
Tues Jan. 21 st	READ: - Pollan, Michael. Ch1: The Plant, Corn’s Conquest. - Katzenberg, Anne M. 2000. Stable Isotope Analysis: A Tool for Studying	

¹ This is an approximation of the course trajectory – should changes to schedule or readings occur, they will be made one week prior to the date, and announced on Brightspace.

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	Past Diet, Demography, and Life History.	
Thursday Jan. 23 rd	Cooking Day #1: Raw Foods READ: - Sherman, Sean. Introduction. The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen.	
Wk 4 What can food inaccessibility look like?		
Tuesday Jan. 28 th	READ: - Pressure Cooker Ch 2. "Room 105", Ch. 12 "Scarce Food"	
Thursday Jan 30 th	Midterm #1	
Part II: The Core		
Wk 5 Colonial impacts to diet		
Tuesday Feb. 4 th	READ: - Bodirsky and Johnson 2008. Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous Foodways.	
Thursday Feb. 6 th	READ: - Czyzewski, Karina. 2011. Colonialism as a Broader Social Determinant of Health.	
Wk 6 Rethinking "Food Deserts"		
Tuesday Feb. 11 th	READ: - Brones, Anna "Food Apartheid: the root of the problem with America's groceries". The Guardian May 18, 2018. - Pressure Cooker, Ch. 8 "Shift Work", Ch. 21 "A Small Fridge" LISTEN: - Edible Activist Podcast, Episode TBD	
Thursday Feb. 13 th	READ: - Akom, Shah and Nakai. 2015. "Kids, Kale, and Concrete: Using Participatory Technology to Transform an Urban American Desert". Guest Lecture: Nashville Food Project	
Wk 7 Immigration		
Tuesday Feb. 18 th	LISTEN: - Gravy Podcast: Bluegrass Tacos	

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	<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure Cooker Ch. 6 “Taking the Time”, Ch. 12 “Takis” - Ejneti, Anjali. 2019. <i>Soak the Beans</i>. Gravy 	
Thursday Feb. 20 th	<i>Guest Lecture: Miguel Cuj, Malnutrition among the Maya</i>	
Wk 8 Food Insecurity in the US South		
Tuesday Feb. 25 th	<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure Cooker Chapter 3 “Deep Roots” and Chapter 5 “Hurtful Words” <p>LISTEN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tommy Tomlinson “Labor Inheritances”. Southern Food Symposium. 	
Thursday Feb. 27 th	<p>LISTEN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edible Activist Podcast <p>Cooking Day #2: A New Soul Food</p>	
Wk 9 (March 2-6 th SPRING BREAK)		
Part 3: The Branches		
Wk 10 Becoming the Food Researcher/Ethnography Ethics - How do you pass the mic?		
Tuesday Mar. 10 th	<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wright, Alliyah. The Labor of Food: Inside Campus Dining 	Due: Ethnography Project Part I
Thursday Mar. 12 th	<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bejarano et al. 2019. Introduction. Decolonizing Ethnography: Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions in Social Science - Pressure Cooker Appendix: Notes on Methods 	
Wk 11		
Tuesday Mar. 17 th	<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bejarano et al. 2019. Chapter 1: Colonial Anthropology and its Alternatives. Decolonizing Ethnography: Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions in Social Science 	
Thursday Mar. 19 th	Midterm #2	

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Wk 12 Healing Meals – the role of community food activism		
Tuesday Mar. 24th	READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White, Monica M. 2018. “Ch2. A Pig and a Garden. Fannie Lou Hamer’s Freedom Farm Cooperative”. In: Freedom Farmers. - Pressure Cooker Ch. 14 “Vote with your fork” <i>Guest Lecture: FASHA Paragon Urban Farm</i>	Due: Ethnography Project Part 2 (sample questions)
Thursday Mar. 26th	READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White, Monica M. 2018. “Ch 5. Drawing on the Past toward a Food Sovereign Future: The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network” In: Freedom Farmers. - Pressure Cooker Ch. 20 “Lotus Café” 	In Class: Make Wellness Week commitment
Wk 13 Wellness Week		
Tuesday Mar. 31st	READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure Cooker Ch. 7: Finding Balance 	
Thursday April 2nd	Cooking Day #3: Food as Medicine	
Wk 14 A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Food Studies		
Tuesday April 7th	READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannuscio et al. 2010 – Urban foodways - Additional readings TBD - Pressure Cooker Ch. 23 “Stop Crying” 	In-class writing: How do these pieces orient the causes of health disparities? How might these causes be reimaged using resources from this semester?
Thursday April 9th	READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure Cooker “Conclusions: Thinking Outside the Kitchen” 	
Wk 15 Wrapping it Up		
Tuesday April 14th	Ethnography check-ins – Students give 5 min presentation	
Thursday April 16th	Cooking Day #4: Food as Community Support	
Wk 16: The final is scheduled for XXX (Ethnography Project)		