SIT SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING STUDY ABROAD

SYLLABUS

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# Food and European Society: From Farm to Table

## SDIS-3060 (3 credits)

### Switzerland: Choose Your Track—Wildlife, Food Systems, Cities OR French Culture

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.*

## Course Description

This interdisciplinary course in the Food Systems Track explores the intricate and dynamic relationship between food and society across Europe. Moving beyond mere sustenance, this course delves into how food production, distribution, consumption, and representation have shaped European cultures, economies, social structures, and identities from historical roots to contemporary settings. Through a "farm to table" lens we examine the journey of food – from agricultural practices and landscapes to culinary traditions, market systems, and the diverse ways Europeans eat and think about what they eat. Through readings, discussions, and local excursions, students will gain a deeper understanding of the complex web connecting food, culture, and society in Europe. This course equips students with the analytical tools to critically examine their own food experiences as compared to a broader European context and to appreciate the multifaceted role of food in shaping human lives and societies.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:
1. **Articulate** the historical evolution of food production and consumption patterns in Europe
2. **Analyze** the cultural significance of food in shaping European identities and traditions
3. **Identify** the social, economic, and political factors influencing European food systems
4. **Evaluate** contemporary issues related to food security, sustainability, and public health in Europe
5. **Compare and contrast** foodways across different European regions and social groups

## Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

## Instructional Methods

SIT's philosophy of education is rooted in experiential learning model, which drives the design of this class. Each module allows for experience, reflection, and application. Experiences range from critical analyses of datasets to site visits and conversations with local experts. These experiences are framed by readings, multimedia texts, and class discussion. Reflection occurs throughout the learning process in various forms, such as verbal debriefs after learning on location experiences to reflexive components in papers/projects. Through reflection, students are encouraged to become aware of their process of learning, to make sense of their experiences, and connect the learning acquired on the program with previous experiences and information. Application activities reinforce learning by practicing communication skills, experimenting with theories, and preparing to transfer learning to future contexts.

**Course Readings**
*\*These are sample readings which can be changed or supplemented by course instructor*

Askegaard, S., & Madsen, T. K. (1995). European food cultures: An exploratory analysis of food related preferences and behaviour in European regions.

Askegaard, S., & Madsen, T. K. (1998). The local and the global: exploring traits of homogeneity and heterogeneity in European food cultures. *International Business Review*, *7*(6), 549-568.

Aouinaït, C., Christen, D., & Zbinden, K. K. (2020). Traditional food, legal and regulatory issues in Switzerland. In *Nutritional and health aspects of food in western Europe* (pp. 219-238). Academic Press.

Bender, O. (2010). Cultural landscape, traditional food and tourism. Rural development in the "Franconian Switzerland". *Challenges for Mountain Regions: Tackling Complexity*, 121.

Chatwin, M. E. (1986). Surviving in Lausanne: some American food and eating habits in Switzerland. *Southern Anthropologist*, *14*(1), 3.

DeSoucey, M. (2010). Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European Union. *American Sociological Review*, *75*(3), 432-455.

Huber, J., & Lorenzini, J. (2022). A field of alternative food organizations: a study of discourses, actions and goals toward food system change in Geneva, Switzerland. *Socio-Economic Review*, mwac011.

Moschitz, H. (2018). Where is urban food policy in Switzerland? A frame analysis. *International Planning Studies*, *23*(2), 180-194.

Montanari, M. (2006). Food is culture. Columbia University Press.

Stotten, R. (2024). Heterogeneity and agency in the contemporary food regime in Switzerland: among the food from nowhere, somewhere, and here sub-regimes. *Review of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Studies*, 1-24.

Welz, G. (2012). The diversity of European food cultures. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe*, 355-372.

## Assignments

### Class Participation (10%)

Students are expected to be physically and mentally present for all classes. To prepare for class, students should critically read the assigned texts prior to each class and come prepared with relevant questions and insights.

### Reflective Food Journal and Analysis (30%)

Each week, students are expected to submit a journal entry (250-500 words) that includes a reflection on class discussions, site visits, readings, and any personal culinary experiences that may be relevant. Students can choose 2 weeks to skip.

### European Food Heritage Project (30%)

Each student will select a specific European food heritage element (e.g., a dish, an ingredient, a culinary tradition, a food-related festival) and document its history, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance. This project will involve research but also an element of "experiencing" the heritage, if possible (e.g., trying to prepare a dish, attending a relevant event, interviewing someone who practices the tradition). Students will present their findings in an engaging 10-minute presentation to the class. Students are expected to reference class readings and conduct additional library research relevant to their chosen topic (4-6 references total).

### Sustainable Food Systems Challenge: Group Project (30%)

In small groups, students will identify a challenge related to food sustainability in Switzerland (or a relevant European context) – e.g., food waste, local sourcing, impact of tourism on food systems. They will then research the issue, analyze potential solutions, and propose a feasible and innovative intervention or policy recommendation. Each group will collaboratively write and submit an 8-10 page policy brief (including 8-10 references).

**Note on Attendance and Participation:** Due to the nature of this experiential program, full participation in all classes and program activities is required. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be

discussed with the Program Director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, which may impact grades. Excessive, unexcused absences could result in program dismissal. Alternative work for absences will be expected.

**Note on Late Assignments:** IHP programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis with approval from the Program Director or other designated staff person. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. Students who do not submit their work within the extension period will receive a failing grade.

**Grading Scale**

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| 94-100% | A | | 74-76% | C |
| 90-93% | A- | | 70-73% | C- |
| 87-89% | B+ | | 67-69% | D+ |
| 84-86% | B | | 64-66% | D |
| 80-83% | B- | | below 64 | F |
| 77-79% | C+ | | | |

**Program Expectations**

In order to make the most of the opportunities presented in program, communicate respectfully, prepare for student success, and demonstrate best possible engagement, SIT has the following expectations of students:

- **Content Considerations:** The texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.

- **Learning Community:** Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across differences and consider other perspectives with respect.

- **Presence.** Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

- **Engage**. Ask questions in class. Interact with the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.

- **Be Honest.** Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

- **Store Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.

- **Personal Technology Use**: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable, especially during a guest lecture or presentation from a peer. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.

- **Course Communication:** Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.

- **Recording Policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

## SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field

study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services,](#) [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

## Course Schedule

*\*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Week 1: Course Introduction

- Review syllabi, assignments, course expectations
- Historical context - the agricultural history of Europe and its impact on landscapes and societies

Week 2: Regional Traditions

- Regional culinary traditions and their historical and cultural roots, with a focus specifically on Switzerland

Week 3: The social life of Food

- The role of food in European festivals, rituals, and social gatherings, again, with a focus on Switzerland

Week 4: Food Networks

- Food markets and distribution systems in urban and rural Europe
- The impact of colonialism and globalization on European foodways

Week 5: Food & Society

- The influence of class, gender, and ethnicity on European diets and food practices

Week 6: European Food Heritage Project Presentations

- See assignment for details

Week 7: Modernization of European food

- The rise of supermarkets, processed foods, and changing dietary patterns

Week 8: Food Justice

- Food security, food sovereignty, and sustainable agriculture in Europe

Week 9: Alternative movements

- The Slow Food movement and other alternative food networks

Week 10: Policy & Public Health

- Food policy, regulation, and public health initiatives in Europe

Week 11: Class Reflections

- Group paper assignment due

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