

HTS 2018 Syllabus

Food and Society-A 3 Credits

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: Laura Bier

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General Course Information

Description

Are we what we eat? Why do we like certain foods and hate others? Who determines what is healthy and good to eat? When is cooking work and when is it leisure? Why do we live in such a food-obsessed society? Why is there so much hunger in a world of plenty?

This course explores these and many other questions by studying the cultural, economic, and geopolitical roles of food and drink in world history from pre-modern times to the present. We will examine how the introduction of new foods (including spices, coffee, tea, chocolate, sugar) transformed empires and global trading networks; how political upheavals, wars, and industrialization transformed food production and food practices; and how reformers and policymakers have alternately worked to reinforce the power of the industrial food system, remedy its flaws, and create alternatives to it. We will pay close attention to the changing meanings of food, hunger, and wellness: How has food acquired meaning through cultural exchange and interaction? How do food practices express and mark identities? How have changing notions of morality shaped the meanings and regulation of particular foods and beverages? How have policymakers, food producers, and food consumers politicized hunger, scarcity, and abundance?

Course Learning Outcomes

- Think historically about food and understand how tastes and perspectives have changed over time and recognize that the past may be interpreted from different perspectives.
- Outline the historical development of key concepts in the history of food (industrialization, globalization) and how this impacted economic development and social and cultural change.
- Critically read, summarize, and analyze primary sources
- Connect contemporary food-related issues with their historical roots.

Required Course Materials

This syllabus was uploaded April 13, 2026. Students should not purchase any of the following books at this time – for two reasons. First, I will be working to make e-books available for all readings through the GT Library. Second, I might make minor changes to the reading list below over the summer. Students are welcome to email me for updates before the start of Fall term if this message still appears on the syllabus as the semester’s start approaches.

Jefferey Pilcher: The Oxford handbook of food history

Lizzie Collingham: *The hungry empire: how Britain's quest for food shaped the modern world*

Grading Policy:

10 Short Weekly Reading Quizzes [20%]

2 Short Primary Source Analyses (one written, one in the format of your choosing)
[15+15=30]

Food journal [5%]

Participation: 20% (based on completion of brief, informal written assignments to prepare for in-class discussions and activities)

Final Project 25%

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Course Policies

Attendance and/or Participation

There is no penalty for missing a single course session. But once you miss 5 or more classes, the grade ceiling starts getting lowered and the highest grade you can achieve is a "B". Miss 7 or more classes, the highest you can get is a "C"; 9 or more, a "D".

Participation grades will be calculated solely in written participation assignments discussed above.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the student [Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Core IMPACTS

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social or geographic relationships develop, persist or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

This is a public institution and all of you are members of the public. It is your right to have the accommodations you need to be successful in this class and at this university. You are not asking for "special treatment" if you have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts). If you have already established accommodations with the Offices of Disability Services, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through Disability Services, but think you may need accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 404.894.2563 or dsinfo@gatech.edu or disabilityservices.gatech.edu.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.