

This upper-level course assumes some previous exposure to the study of religion, and uses that background to help them dig deeper into religious practices and beliefs related to food. –BEZ

REL 380: Religion and Food in America (Fall 2007)

TR, 11:30-12:45 PM; MG 203

Instructor: Ben Zeller

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“One is what one eats.” (“Der Mensch ist, was er ißt.”)

- Ludwig Feuerbach, 1804-1872

Course Description

Everyone eats, and every religion talks about eating. In this class, we sample from a rich menu of religious approaches to food, making use of memoirs, scholarly articles, spirituality guides, cookbooks, and histories. From the Christian Communion to Jewish Kosher laws to the Hindu Prasadam (food-offering), the world’s major religions use food to structure the lives, practices, and beliefs of their adherents. In this class we digest some of the symbolic meanings, self-definitions, and communal and individual identities that develop out of religion and food. We focus on the popular, practiced, lived, aspects of food and religion.

Course Prerequisites

The course assumes a certain previous engagement with the academic study of religion. Therefore, it is open to students who have taken at least one class in religious studies, or by permission of the instructor.

Course Objectives

Students enrolled in this class will learn to:

- study the cultural and social meanings of food
- draw connections between food and religion
- unpack the complex relation of religion and culture
- analyze their own engagement with religion and food

Required Coursebooks

The following required texts are available for purchase at the Brevard College bookstore:

Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam’s Kitchen: A Memoir*

Chitrita Banerji, *Feeding the Gods: Memories of Food and Culture in Bengal*

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Higher Taste: A Guide to Gourmet Vegetarian Eating and Karma-free Diet*

L. Shannon Jung, *Food For Life: The Spirituality of Food and Eating*

Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*

Robert C. Fuller, *Religion and Wine: A Cultural History of Wine Drinking in the United States*

We will also make use of readings available on Sakai.

Grading

Response Questions	10%	Response Papers	30%
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Participation	15%	Thanksgiving Analysis	10%
Final Research Paper	30%		

Percentage to Letter Grade Ratios:

93-100 = A	83-87 = B	73-77 = C	63-67 = D
90-92 = A-	80-82 = B-	70-72 = C-	60-62 = D-
88-89 = B+	78-79 = C+	68-69 = D+	Below 60 = F

Explanations:

- A level work far exceeds basic assignment requirements; the work is of excellent quality.
- B level work exceeds basic assignment requirements; the work is good or very good.
- C level work meets basic assignment requirements; the work is satisfactory.
- D level work does not meet most of the basic assignment requirements; the work is poor but passing.
- An F is usually given for work that is of extremely poor quality. The work typically fails to meet most of the requirements of an assignment, or of the course.

Attendance and Participation

In keeping with Brevard College attendance policy, “attendance at all class sessions is expected of students.” If you are unable to attend class, please inform me in advance, or as soon as possible in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Unless you are granted an exception due to illness, family emergency, or other extenuating circumstance, students who miss three or more classes will lose one point per missed class from their final grades.

Please don’t arrive late, it distracts me and your classmates, and is *very* rude. Also, please turn off your cell phones when you arrive to class.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Response/Discussion Questions: when it works best, this class should be driven by *your* questions and interests. In order to help us focus on the concerns that most interest you, please prepare a set of 3 questions before class. Make the questions short and direct, but developed enough that we can get a discussion going based on them. Please email the questions to me by 10 AM the day of class.

Participation: this class is heavily dependent on your participation. Of course participation begins with being prepared for class. It also includes taking part in our discussions and being a full part of our classroom conversations. Additionally, once during the semester I would like each of you to volunteer to run our discussion.

Response Papers: we have three major units in the class, and for each you will have the opportunity to write a response paper. For the paper, your job is to consider the overarching theme (e.g., “Judaism and Food”) with specific reference to the primary source readings (e.g., *Miriam’s Kitchen*) and secondary articles (Soler, Harris, etc.). Papers should be approximately 5-7 pages long.

Thanksgiving meal ritual analysis: the holiday of Thanksgiving offers a chance for us to do a little participant-observation ethnography. Over Thanksgiving break, I ask each of you to be

very aware of your celebration of the holiday that some scholars have called the foremost holiday of America's civil religion. (We will discuss what this means during class.) When you return from Thanksgiving we will discuss your findings, and to aid us in our discussion, please prepare a 5 page paper that you will distribute to myself and your peers over email by Monday, November 26.

Final Paper: you will produce a research paper on a topic of your choice related to the issue of religion and food. Additional details are available on our course's Sakai website.

Written Work

For all written work, please use the following format: computer-produced or typewritten (not hand-written!), double-spaced, Times (or Times New Roman) 12 point font, 1-1.25" margins. If your printer can support it, please print double-sided so as to reduce our use of paper.

Disability Accommodations

If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information, or if you need special arrangements for building evacuation, please inform me as soon as possible. Students with disabilities also need to contact the Office for Students with Special Needs and Disabilities located in Coltrane Commons to arrange accommodations for this course.

Class Schedule

Appetizer: The Study of Religion and Food

Aug 30: Studying the Menu: Religion and Food?

First class meeting. No reading or assignments.

Sept. 4: Food as Lived Religious Practice

Read: "Religion and Food" (*Ency. of Food and Culture [EFC]*); "Foodways" (*EFC*); Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal"

First Course: Matzah Ball Soup (Food in Judaism)

Sept. 6: Introduction to Food and Judaism

Read: "Judaism" (*EFC*); Harris, "The Abominable Pig"

Sept. 11: Food Practice and the Hebrew Bible

Read: Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; Soler, "The Semiotics of Food in the Bible"

Sept. 13: NO CLASS

Sept. 18: Eating in Miriam's Kitchen I: Food and the Formation of Religious Identity

Read: Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*, pg. 1-50, 111-140 (Sept-Oct, Jan)

Sept. 20: Eating in Miriam's Kitchen II: Food, Family, and Religious Memory

Read: Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*, pg. 289-362 (Jul-Sept)

Sept. 25: Focus on a Lived Practice: The Passover Seder

Read: Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*, pg. 206-222; Sherman, "The Passover Seder"

First Side Dish: Barbecue

Sept. 27: Religion & Popular Culture: Pigging Out on Barbecue

Read: Roof, "Blood in the Barbecue?"; Ferris, "Exploring Southern Jewish Foodways"

Second Course: Prasadam (Food in Hinduism)

Oct. 2: Introduction to Food and Hinduism

Read: "Hinduism" (*EFC*); "Hindu Festivals" (*EFC*); Banerji, *Feeding the Gods*, pg. 3-60 (Chaps 1-4)

Oct. 4: NO CLASS (Professor out of town)

Oct. 9: Food Practice, Holidays, and Transnational Identity

Read: Banerji, *Feeding the Gods*, pg. 61-134 (Chaps 5-9)

Oct. 11: Feeding the Gods in India, Feeding Humans in America

Read: Moreno, "Pancamirtam"; Swami Prabhupada, *The Higher Taste*, ix-36

Oct. 16: Food Evangelism and Spiritual Vegetarianism

Read: Swami Prabhupada, *The Higher Taste*, 37-77, 149-156, skim 77-149

Oct. 18: Worship, Immigration, and Hindu Foodways

Read: Toomey, "Mountain of Food, Mountain of Love"; McClymond, "You are Where You Eat"

Oct. 23: Fall Break (NO CLASS)

Second Side Dish: A Little Vegetarian Snack

Oct. 25: Religion & Popular Culture: Vegetarianism ... as a Religion?

Read: Maria McGrath, "Recipes for a New World"

Third Course: Wine and Wafers – Or Coffee? (Food in Christianity)

Oct. 30: Introduction to Christianity and Food

Read: "Christianity" (*EFC*); Luke 22.1-23; Acts 10.1-33

Nov. 1: Focus on a Lived Practice: Communion and Eucharist

Special Visit by Chaplain Shelly Webb

Read: TBA

Nov. 6: Religion Outside the Church: A Christian Theology of Everyday Eating

Read: Jung, *Food For Life*, pg xi-132

Nov. 8: American Protestant Christian Foodways: From Communion Controversies to Potlucks

Read: Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, pg. 1-98

Nov. 13: American Protestant Christian Foodways: The Moral Value of Food
Read: Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, pg. 99-224

Fourth Course: Thanksgiving Stuffing

Nov. 15: Thanksgiving Thoughts

Read: Finch, "Pinched with Hunger, Partaking of Plenty"

Nov. 19: NO CLASS (Professor at American Academy of Religion)

Nov. 22: Thanksgiving Break (No class).

Nov. 27: Religion & Popular Culture: Thanksgiving Rituals and the Family

Read: Wallendorf and Arnould, "Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day; Siskand, "The Invention of Thanksgiving"

After-Dinner Drinks: Comparative Analyses

Nov. 29: The Drinkable Food: Religion and Wine

Read: Fuller, *Religion and Wine*, introduction and chaps 1-3

Dec. 4: Wine as Cultural Symbol / Wine and Social Control

Read: Fuller, *Religion and Wine*, chaps 4-5 and epilogue

Dec. 6: Student Presentations

Readings as assigned by class members

Dec. 11: Student Presentations

Readings as assigned by class members

Dec 13, 1:30 PM: Final Paper Due in MG 237.