GENERAL EDUCATION RATIONALE AND ASSESSMENT PLAN

COMPARATIVE STUDIES 2420 AMERICAN FOOD CULTURES

The future of food ranks as one of the major challenges of the 21stC. Accelerating climate change, environmental degradation, a global population expected to top 8.5 billion by 2030, unprecedented numbers of people on the move worldwide: these are just of the few of the factors stressing the existing food system, and raising serious questions about the viability and resilience of current patterns of production, distribution and consumption. Ohio State University has focused two of its Discovery Themes--Foods for Health and InFACT (the Initiative for Food and AgriCultural Transformation)--on this critical challenge, but the broader significance of the topic remains poorly understood and

under-represented within the General Education curriculum. To become what the GE goals call “educated, productive and principled citizens of the United States and the world,” students will need to be able to think critically and creatively about the issues surrounding food.

In particular, students will need ways to come to terms with the cultural dimensions of food and foodways. Meeting the challenges of the 21st century will involve far more than simply producing more food: fundamental questions about justice and human rights, national sovereignty and cultural identities, standards of living and ecological limits, arise as we enter what is now widely termed the Anthropocene era. Most members of the United Nations--although not, significantly, the United

States--recognize a right to food as part of a core schedule of human rights; for the U.N.’s Special Rapporteur, it includes “the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensure

a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.”1 Ironically

enough, this formulation itself has U.S. roots, growing out of President Roosevelt’s 1941 State of the Union Address on the “Four Freedoms” (including freedom from want and freedom from fear), which subsequently formed the basis of Allied war aims in WWII. Subsequent efforts to alleviate famines worldwide and to reshape patterns of agricultural production through a Green Revolution bear the imprint of American experiences of both hunger and abundance.

Taught within the context of Comparative Studies, American Food Cultures will take a distinct interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the cultural dimensions of food production and consumption. Starting with questions and methods developed in the emerging field of food studies, the course will frame foodways as sites for the enactment of social identities, modes of both inclusion and exclusion. Taking a historical perspective on the development of the food system, the course will attend to the

1 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/food/pages/foodindex.aspx> Accessed 7/30/18

discourses and visual cultures associated with American” food, including the rise of “rational” and “scientific” constructions of dietary requirements and refraction of experiences of colonialism, slavery and immigration through distinctive iconographies of Southern hospitality and “ethnic” cuisines.

Connecting these discourses to contemporary concerns about industrial food and the American diet, the course will raise questions about the cultural politics of efforts to transform the food system in pursuit of more sustainable and equitable ends.

GE Cultures and Ideas:

1. Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression.
2. Students evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

GE classes meeting the “Culture and Ideas” requirement are supposed to have “students evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas in order to develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; and interpretation and evaluation.” As a 2000-level class, the goal of “American Food Cultures” is initially to position food--an everyday experience, commonly taken for granted by undergraduates--as a significant cultural phenomenon, embedded in histories of the environment, capitalism, agriculture and the state, and entangled in debates about modernity, social status, and national and ethnic identity. The very dailiness of food, in fact, both demonstrates and conceals its cultural significance: everyone eats, and in doing so, both consumes and produces meanings. Foodways both unite and divide us, thereby illustrating an essential feature of the concept of culture itself.

Discovering the myriad ways food choices and dietary habits are shaped by more than personal preference and individual taste should go a long way towards meeting the initial ELO in this category, having “Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression.” In this class, students will analyze and interpret food culture in three distinct dimensions: its performative or ritual aspects, its relation to larger histories, and its cultural-political entanglement with debates about sustainability, social justice and global trade. Students will demonstrate their comprehension of these three dimensions by producing three papers, prepared for by brief writing assignments covering the readings and class discussions. Considering the rationale and context for OSU’s pledge to source 40% of its food locally and sustainably by 2025 will bring students to “evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior,” as required by the second Culture and Ideas ELO. Ideas about the local, beliefs about agriculture, perceptions of climate change, and norms of freedom and responsibility are among the topics students will be asked to evaluate.

GE Diversity—Social Diversity in the US

1. Students describe and evaluate the roles of such categories as race, gender and sexuality, disability, class, ethnicity, and religion in the pluralistic institutions and cultures of the United States.
2. Students recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.

It is impossible to conceptualize American Food Cultures without confronting the issue of social diversity. From melting pots to salad bowls, food constitutes a particularly vivid site for examining the implications of different models of pluralism. From the earliest contrasts between Native and European forms of agriculture and provisioning, through the dietary implications of agrarian farming and plantation slavery cultures, up through the conquest of the Southwest and the contrasting histories of West and East Coast immigration, categories of race, class, gender, ethnicity and religion find themselves viscerally embodied through the organization of foodways. To understand the making of “American food,” students will describe and evaluate how these categories serve to mainstream and to marginalize, to assimilate, discriminate and celebrate difference, as called for by the “Social Diversity in the US” ELO. The making of “Tex-Mex” or “Cajun” cuisine, iconic figures like Aunt Jemima or Colonel Sanders, and dishes such as chop suey, gefilte fish and collard greens will be the subject of readings, oral reports, papers and even taste-tests. Institutions such as supermarkets, food courts and farmers markets, pivotal to our food system, provide key examples of pluralism at work, allowing students “to recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.” While it would be foolhardy to claim that a single course could adequately address all the diversity categories enumerated in the ELO, the example of food and dietary habits can flesh out (as it were) how categorical distinctions operate in and through daily practices.

In this course, students will learn to think about food, foodways and food systems as significant cultural phenomena, shaped by specific histories, enacting particular identities and expressing distinct social norms and values. By examining the ways that, as Wendell Berry puts it, “eating is an agricultural act,” students will fulfill the GE “Culture and Ideas” goal of evaluating “how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.” By considering how the legacies of colonialism, agrarianism, slavery, immigration and globalization continue to reverberate through our food system, the course will equip students to analyze how American pluralism is organized in practice, in both its mainstream mass-cultural aspects and its marginalized and alternative formations. By engaging current debates about reforming the food system, students will grapple with the ways their own attitudes and expectations are refracted through

ideas about social diversity, equity and justice. In doing so, students enrolled in American Food Cultures will get a chance to explore culture, ideas and social diversity in the US in unique and intellectually compelling ways.

# ASSESSMENT PLAN

Direct Measure:

Assessment will take place via pretest/post-test responses to key course materials.

For CI ELO 1: students will be presented a historical image such as J.L.G. Ferris’ “The First Thanksgiving” or Norman Rockwell’s “Freedom From Want” and asked to provide a brief analysis of what values and issues are expressed via the cultural symbols represented.

Students will be assessed on scale of excellent—good—fair—poor based on their ability to interpret the image as a mode of expression imparting cultural beliefs and values.

For CI ELO 2: students will be shown a commercial for a national fast-food chain and asked to analyze its appeal to prevalent beliefs, norms and realities.

Students will be assessed on scale of excellent—good—fair—poor based on their ability to evaluate the commercial by identifying the ideas represented in it as well as their ability to comment on how those ideas have influenced individual beliefs and behaviors.

For SD ELO 1, students will asked to give examples of how race, gender and sexuality, disability, class, ethnicity, and religion affect American food consumption.  
  
Students will be assessed on scale of excellent—good—fair—poor based on their ability to provide extensive and insightful examples about their understanding of community behavioral patterns regarding food consumption and their ability to see larger-scale impacts of food production and delivery systems (i.e., farm subsidies, food desserts, tariff impacts, etc.)

For SD ELO 2, students will be asked how institutional food policies--such as OSU’s 40% local-food mandate--should reflect the understanding of social diversity in the United States.

Students will be assessed on scale of excellent—good—fair—poor based on their ability to recognize complexities in food policies as they relate to social factors in food consumption and to identify difficulties in ensuring equity as it relates to food policy.

# Evaluation:

There is no existing baseline by which to calibrate this survey: although the course is meant to be offered at the 2000 level, aimed at first- and second-year students, GE classes often enroll juniors and seniors needing to fulfill requirements, and more advanced students will likely start with higher levels of competence. Similarly, the subject of the course is intended to attract a range of students from across the university; common expectations about reading and writing in humanities courses will need to be negotiated early on. As a result, the pitch of the course reflects my best guess about what students will already know and need to learn. As the demographics of the course get established, subsequent iterations will allow for a more closely calibrated pretest/post-test assessment, or be replaced with more effective methods of GE assessment.

Indirect Measures:

Self-evaluation: At the end of the course, students will be surveyed about opportunities the course provided to meet each ELO.

The assessment sheet is standardized across all Comparative Studies GE courses and looks like the following:

This course is designed to meet the following GEs: Culture and Ideas and Social Diversity in the United States. Expected Learning Outcomes for these GE are:

Cultures and Ideas ELO1. Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression. This course provided opportunities for me to meet this objective. Strongly Agree –Agree –Disagree –Strongly Disagree   
How?

Cultures and Ideas ELO2. Students evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior. This course provided opportunities for me to meet this objective. Strongly Agree –Agree –Disagree –Strongly Disagree  
How?

SocDivUS1. Students describe and evaluate the roles of such categories as race, gender and sexuality, disability, class, ethnicity, and religion in the pluralistic institutions and cultures of the United StatesThis course provided opportunities for me to meet this objective. Strongly Agree –Agree –Disagree –Strongly Disagree  
How?

SocDivUS 2. Students recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.This course provided opportunities for me to meet this objective. Strongly Agree –Agree –Disagree –Strongly Disagree  
How?   
Other comments:

Evaluation:

Results are tallied for each course at the end of each term. A summary of responses is appended to the individual student response sheets. These are placed on file with previous terms’ offerings in the department for long term review. Faculty members assigned to teach the course as well as the program coordinator, undergraduate chair, and department chair can review the responses in order to make adjustments to the course from term to term and year to year.