Course Description

This graduate level course explores the food culture and food systems of the culturally and historically rich culinary landscape of Mexico. Students will be fully immersed in Mexican food practices through classroom instruction, guest lectures, and a wide variety of field trips to markets, local farms, restaurants, and production sites. We will analyze contemporary Mexican food ways as the endpoint of a historical process stretching from pre-Colombian indigenous civilization, Spanish colonization, national independence and state-driven development, to neoliberal reform and contemporary social movements. The course will focus especially on corn (maize) as a symbolic and material axis around which the Mexican food system has evolved in these different periods.

Course Objectives

• To better understand Mexican food and identity by examining the history of Mexico’s agrifood system.
• To identify and understand the foods, spices, beverages, and preparatory techniques that constitute the rich and diverse Mexican cuisine.
• To examine and understand the complicated food system that includes local, regional, national and transnational components.
• To examine the implications of social and economic changes on contemporary diet and nutrition.
• To investigate the role that food plays in the construction of Mexican identity.

Class Requirements and Evaluation Policy

Class Participation (25%)
Students are expected to attend and actively participate in all lectures and in-class exercises, discussions, debriefing sessions and field trips. Any conflict associated with religious holidays or personal obligations should be discussed with the professor; all other absences will be considered unexcused and will impact the final. In addition, students are expected to come to class/field trips on time to prevent disrupting the lecture and activities.

Blog Project (75%)
Students will be organized into pairs and assigned a specific topic from the syllabus (see below). Your assignment is to integrate the course readings, class discussion, and experiential learning (site visits, lectures, observation) into a 2-3 page reflection that will be published on a public course blog (using wordpress—I will set this up). You are encouraged to incorporate photography and video from our course activities and your free-time exploration, as well as internet media into your blog posts. However, as a reminder, the people we encounter in Mexico are not just subjects to be studied, and their images are not ours to take without permission. Please be sensitive in this matter.
Grading:
A “C” grade demonstrates adequate work or participation; a “B” grade demonstrates above average participation and work; an “A” grade demonstrates superior participation and mastery of the material via thoughtful synthesis and analysis.

Grading Scale (out of a possible 100 points): 100-93=A; 92-90=A-, 89-87=B+; 86-83=B; 82-80=B-; 79-77 = C+; 76-73 = C; 72-70 = C-; 69-65 = D+; 64-60 = D; 60 or below = F

Required Readings
All required readings will be on NYU classes. Please complete all the required readings before our arrival date.

1. Historical Intro
   Intro and Section I (The Great Encounter). Pp 1-112.

2. Agriculture and Foodways in Pre-columbian Mesoamerica


Suggested:

3. Agriculture and Foodways in Colonial New Spain


4. The Porfiriato and The Mexican Revolution


Suggested:
Flores Magon, R. “Land and Liberty.” Pp 335-38

5. Land Reform and Nationalist Development

Chapters 3 and 4. Pp 41-125.

Suggested:

6. Counter Reform and Neoliberalization
Otero, G. “Mexico’s Double movement, neoliberal globalism, the state and civil society.” In *Mexico in Transition: Neoliberal Globalism, the State and Civil Society.* Pp. 1-17.


Suggested:

7. Evolving Food Retail


Suggested:

9. Agrifood Mobilizations and Reactions to Neoliberalism
Ch 2: Rebellious cornfields: towards food and labour self-sufficiency.  
Ch 5: State corporatism and peasant organizations: towards new institutional arrangements

Ch 6: Hipsters, Hope, and the Future of Artisanal Mezcal

Suggested:
Ch 11: Survival strategies in neoliberal markets: peasant organizations and organic coffee in Chiapas

10. Tying it all Together (can be completed after trip)
Course Schedule

Friday, February 9.
Pre-departure Meeting: Logistics and Introduction to Mexico

Friday, February 23.
Pre-departure Meeting: Pre-Colombian and Colonial Foodways

Saturday, March 10
Students arrive to Mexico City by 12:00pm
Welcome dinner - Cafe de Tacuba

Sunday, March 11
Guest lecture: pre-columbian agrifood system
Visit to the Mexican Anthropology Museum
Street Food and San Juan Market Tour

Monday, March 12
Transit to Puebla
Guest Lecture: corn, farming, and land in Puebla
Visit to campesino farm in an agrarian from community (ejido)
Visit to tortilla factory

Tuesday, March 13
Visit to Hacienda for demonstration and experience of transforming corn into tortillas.

Wednesday, March 14
Visit to industrial pork farm and packing plant

Thursday, March 15
Visit to an industrial tortilla factory
Visit to a mechanized corn farm

Friday, March 16
Leave Puebla and Return to Mexico City
Panel of Anti-GMO Activists
Panel on Food, Nutrition and Public Health
Free time in Coyoacan

Saturday, March 17
Guest Lecture: Contemporary peasant movements
Farewell dinner

Sunday, March 18
Students check out of housing after 12:00pm

Friday, April 13 Post-Trip Meeting and Presentations of Blog Projects