

FOOD AND CULTURE

Degree on Food and Culture. Course 2026-27

Code: 803972

Module: 1

Matter: Historia

Type of subject: Básica

Course: 1st

Semester: 2nd

Departaments: Public Health and Maternal and Child Health – Nutrition and food Science

Credits: 6 ECTS

Starting date: 19th January 2027

Schedule: Tuesday 8,30; Thursday 9,30; Friday: 10,30

Classroom: Aula 15. Faculty of Medicine

Number of students: 75

COORDINATOR

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TEACHERS

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION

This course aims to analyze the complexity of food in our society. It seeks to help students understand that food is not only a biological, nutritional, and medical phenomenon, but also a social, psychological, economic, symbolic, and religious one. In short, food must be considered not only experimentally and technically, but also culturally, in the broadest sense of the term.

The extreme complexity of food necessitates taking into account a wide range of issues of a biological, ecological, technological, economic, social, political, and ideological nature. Why do we eat what we eat and not something else? Where is the dividing line between edible and inedible? The selection of foods that a society makes from among the various accessible and edible resources is sometimes explained by ecological, technical, or economic reasons. In other cases, it is considered a matter of "taste" or "flavor," and very often, it is explained by "beliefs" regarding the goodness or badness attributed to certain foods. And it can also be explained by the "status" of food within the systems of organization and functioning of human societies.

Ultimately, it is culture that creates, among human beings, the system of communication that dictates what is edible and inedible, what is beneficial and harmful, appropriate and inappropriate in food.

In accordance with these premises, this course aims to situate food within the broader context of society and culture, thus analyzing the multiple and diverse factors that influence eating.

COMPETENCES

General Competences

CG.1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.3, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 7.1, 7.3, 7.4 y 8.1.

Specific competences

CE.M1.1, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2., 2.4., 2.5, 2.6, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 4.01, 4.02, 4.04, 4.17, 4.19, y 4.22.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze the most significant milestones in the humanization of eating habits and understand the evolution of the main dietary strategies developed by human societies, particularly how the problem of food supply was addressed during periods of population growth.
2. Understand the historical development of scientific discourse surrounding food, nutrition, and dietetics.
3. Analyze the historical evolution of malnutrition and the main eating disorders.
4. Understand the conceptual framework of dietary and nutritional transitions. Acquire a comprehensive understanding of changes in food systems or diets and the factors that have determined them.
5. Understand the historical evolution of the symbolic values associated with eating practices in Western culture.
6. Understand and appreciate the symbolic aspects of food in contemporary Western society.
7. Appreciate the importance of dietary habits for human health.
8. Understand the foods consumed in each era and culture and relate the norms of each culture to dietary customs.

CONTENTS

1. General Introduction to the Subject.
2. Food in Prehistory. The symbolism of food in Paleolithic hunter-gatherer societies: magical practices related to obtaining and consuming food.
3. The Neolithic Revolution. The symbolism of food in Neolithic hunter-gatherer cultures. The fertility of the land.
4. Dietary Models of Antiquity. Mystery cults and their relationship to agriculture. Food rituals in the Ancient World: the banquet as sacrifice.
5. The Medieval Dietary Model.
6. The Modern Dietary Model.
7. The Challenge of Industrialization. The development of contemporary scientific nutrition.
8. The symbolism of food in modern and contemporary Western culture.
9. Food and Disease. Hunger and deficiency diseases throughout history.
10. Food and Pleasure.
11. The education of taste in different cultures.
12. Eating habits. Factors that influence the formation and modification of different habits. Symbolism and uses of food. Foods brought back from explorations. The trade of species.
13. Food in America before the Discovery.
14. Eating habits in Spain before the 15th century and their impact on later periods.
15. Spanish food habits in the 15th century.

16. Spanish food habits in the 16th century.
17. Spanish food habits in the 17th century.
18. Monasteries and their relationship to food.
19. Food habits in Spain in the 18th Century.
20. Food habits in Spain during the 19th Century.
21. Establishments for the sale and consumption of food in Spain. 15th to 19th Centuries.
22. Food habits in Spain in the 20th Century and future.
23. Major discoveries in nutrition: energy, protein requirements, vitamins, minerals, bioactive compounds, and the interaction between diet and genetics.
24. Cultural bases of eating habits, beliefs, misconceptions, and priorities in nutrition.
25. Food and culture in different stages of life (childhood and adolescence). Cultural factors.
26. Food and culture in different stages of life (pregnancy). Cultural factors.
27. Food and culture in different stages of life (old age). Cultural factors.
28. Nutrition and culture in athletes: Historical foundations and current relevance.
29. Social and cultural foundations of fad diets.
30. Social media: its influence on nutrition. Cases of study.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Lectures: The course syllabus is explained. Attendance is mandatory.

Seminars and practical sessions: Literary, historical, and documentary texts related to food are used as materials. Topics covered include: the symbolism of food, changing cultural food patterns, the contrast between traditional and intensive food production, the impact of genetic engineering on food, and the socio-cultural aspects of diet in the contemporary Western world. Attendance to seminars is mandatory.

Student assignments: Students will review scientific literature related to the seminars, and complete works addressing the objectives outlined in each seminar.

Attention to students: Three hours for each student (one hour with each department responsible for teaching).

EVALUATION

The final scores for students will be calculated based on the final exam (70%) and attendance and participation in seminars (30%). The final exam will be a written model..

Procedure to follow in the event of a voluntary or accidental violation of the exam rules:

A voluntary or accidental violation of the exam rules will result in the exam not being graded. Therefore, the offending student will be required to take an oral exam to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter. If the deception is found to be intentional, it will be considered a very serious ethical breach and will be reported to the Academic Services Inspectorate for appropriate disciplinary action.

In the event that academic authorities mandate remote learning during the upcoming semester, instruction will be delivered online. The tools available on the virtual campus for this purpose will be used in this circumstance.

BIBLIOGRAFÍA / ENLACES EN INTERNET RELACIONADOS

Bernabeu-Mestre, Josep; Josep Xavier Esplugues Pellicer y Eva María Trescastro-López (2014). "Evolución histórica de las estrategias alimentarias y sus condicionantes." Universidad de Alicante. Disponible en: <https://rua.ua.es/dspace/handle/10045/45087>

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Torija Isasa, E y Matallana González, MC. "Evolución histórica de la alimentación en España. Influencia de otras culturas". Monografía/Recurso didáctico. Formato CD. Registro de la Propiedad Intelectual de los Textos: 09-RTPI-04670.1/2019. ISBN: 978-84-09-13319-2. Madrid, 2019. Publicado en el E-Prints de la Complutense. <https://biblioteca.ucm.es/far/bibliografia-recomendada-f>

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Salas, J., García P., Sánchez, J.M. (Eds.) (2005). La alimentación y la nutrición a través de la historia. Editorial Glosa, SL.

Contreras Hernández, J y García Arnaiz, M. Alimentación y Cultura. Perspectivas antropológicas. Ed. Ariel. Barcelona. 2005.

Díaz Yubero, I. La evolución de la alimentación y la gastronomía en España. Real Academia de Gastronomía. Disponible en: www.bne.es. Documento Cocina-estudio. S.A

Beltrán B, Carbajal A, Cuadrado C, García-Diz L, Goñi I, Sierra JL. Innovadieta, Recursos en Internet para formación y prácticas de Dietética y Nutrición. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Desde 2013 Actualizaciones periódicas. Disponible en: <https://www.ucm.es/innovadieta/>

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Olga Moreiras Tuny, Carmen Núñez Martín, Susana del Pozo de la Calle, Carmen Cuadrado Vives, José Manuel Ávila Torres, Emma Ruiz Moreno, Gregorio

Varela Moreiras. Dietas y productos mágicos. FEN-Instituto de Nutrición y Trastornos Alimentarios de la Comunidad de Madrid. INUTCAM. 2009. <http://www.madrid.org/bvirtual/BVCM009823.pdf>

Código PAOS, Código de autorregulación de la publicidad de alimentos dirigida a menores, prevención de la obesidad y salud. http://www.aecosan.msssi.gob.es/AECOSAN/docs/docum/mentos/nutricion/Nuevo_Codigo_PAOS_2012_espanol.pdf

Approved by Department Board, on April 29th, 2026