

****Prospective Syllabus****
Plants and People: A History
Introductory-Level Undergraduate Class

Semester:
Dates:
Class Time: Mon., Weds, Fri.
Classroom:

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Mendelsohn
Office:
Office Hours:
Email: mendelsohnr@si.edu

Course Description

This course is designed to explore a history of human-environmental interaction through our species' relationship with plants, particularly as they are used for food and alcohol. Emphasizing case studies from the Near East, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the course will cover major human milestones, including hunting and gathering, the origin of agriculture, the meeting of the Old and New worlds, and subsequent colonialism and globalization. We will also address the methods by which archaeologists identify plants in the archaeological record and reconstruct past environments. With readings on plant foods in prehistory, history, and today, this course is intended to address the past, present, and future of eating and drinking.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Discuss where plant foods originated, biologically and culturally
- Give examples of the cultural importance of plants
- Summarize different trajectories for the development of agriculture
- Explain how the past movement of plant species impacts our society today

Texts

Readings will be available through Blackboard (see reading list below).

Grade Breakdown

In-Class Participation 20%
Reading List Assignments 25%
Food Journal Assignment 30%
Final Exam Feast 25%
*Extra Credit: Food Assignment

In-Class Participation (20% of final grade)

Participation is an important part of this class and students are expected to actively participate during all class sessions. This means contributing to in-class discussions and activities and active listening during lectures and films. Un-excused absences will result in a deduction of participation points.

Reading List Assignments (25% of final grade)

Reading list assignments will vary by class period but are intended as short assignments to help students clarify their readings or use online resources to further delve into a topic. Assignments will be described the class period prior to their due date.

Examples:

1. List four things you learned from today's reading
2. List three examples of how the desire for alcohol impacted the origin of agriculture

Food Journal Assignment (30% of final grade)

Four times a week, students will pick a plant food item from a meal or snack they eat or drink and write a paragraph on one of the following themes:

1. How did that item come to your table? (historically or through today's globalized market)
2. A cultural tradition or taboo associated with that food in your own or another culture

Students are encouraged to do preliminary research online (include citations) or reference relevant class readings.

Final Exam Feast (25% of final grade)

Your final exam is tied to our end of term "feast." I will bring in a series of foods for the class and students will have one hour to complete the exam by answering essay questions about the history and cultural significance of the plant foods presented. After the exam, we can eat!

***Extra Credit Food Assignment**

Students are invited to bring a class "snack." To get full credit, students will present a history of the food provided or share its cultural significance for their or another culture. Please speak to the instructor if you plan to complete this assignment, so that we can distribute student snacks on different days of the course.

Week 1: Introduction	Readings
Introduction	
Cultural Uses for Plants	TBD
How do we know? Intro. to Paleoethnobotany	Banning 2000, Chapter 11
Week 2: Hunting and Gathering, Horticulture	
Plant foods and Human Ancestors	Sayers 2015
Hunting and Gathering	TBD
Horticulture	TBD
Week 3: Origins of Agriculture	
Origin of agriculture in the Near East	Bar-Yosef and Meadow 1995
Origin of agriculture in Asia	Higham 1995
Origin of agriculture in the Americas	Piperno 2006
Week 4: Drugs and Alcohol	
Beer! Alcohol and Agriculture	Excerpt from McGovern 2009, <i>Uncorking the Past</i>
Hallucinogenic Plants	Excerpt from Schultes and Hofmann 1979, <i>Plants of the Gods</i> ; Excerpt from Pollan 2001, <i>The Botany of Desire</i>
Feasting: Parties in Prehistory	Dietler 2001
Week 5: Intensive Agriculture in the Ancient World	
Terracing	TBD
Gardens (Chinampas, rock gardens, etc.)	Parsons 1991
Storage and Redistribution	Wesson 1999
Week 6: Other Cultural Uses for Plants	
Medicinal Plants	TBD
Plants and Craft Activities	TBD
Architecture, etc.	TBD
Week 7: Plants and the Columbian Exchange	
Islands and Introductions	TBD
New World meets Old World	Braudel, Fernand 1992
Old World meets New World	Excerpt from Crosby 1972, <i>The Columbian Exchange</i>

Week 8: Plants as Commodities	
The Spice Trade	Standage 2009, Chapters 5-6
Coffee and Tea	TBD
Chocolate	McAnany and Murata 2007
Week 9: Colonialism and Slavery	
Intro	Dietler 2007
Sugar, Tobacco	Excerpt from Mintz 1985, <i>Sweetness and Power</i>
Bananas	Excerpt from Chapman 2007, <i>Bananas</i>
Week 10: Plants and Globalization	
TBD	TBD
TBD	TBD
National Identity and Global Cuisines	Higman 2012, Chapter 8
Week 11: Trends and Changes in Food Marketing	
Organic Food	Pollan 2006
GMOs	TBD
Fair Trade	Moberg and Lyon 2010
Week 12: An Insatiable Desire for Plants	
Deforestation	TBD
World Food Crisis	Paarlberg 2005
Final Exam Week	

Reading List:

Week 1: Introduction

Banning, E. B.

2000 Analysing Plant Remains. In *The Archaeologist's Laboratory: The Analysis of Archaeological Data*, pp. 213-233. Kluwer Academic Publishers, New York.

Week 2: Hunting and Gathering, Horticulture

Sayers, Ken

2015 Real Paleodiet: Early Hominids Ate Just about Everything. *The Conversation*: Feb. 17.

Week 3: Origins of Agriculture

Bar-Yosef, Ofer and Richard H. Meadow

1995 The Origins of Agriculture in the Near East. In *Last Hunters, First Farmers*, pp. 39-94.

Higham, Charles

1995 The Transition to Rice Cultivation in Southeast Asia. In *Last Hunters-First Farmers: New Perspectives on the Prehistoric Transition to Agriculture*, edited by T. Douglas Price and Birgitte Gebauer, pp. 127-155. School of American Research Press, Santa Fe.

Piperno, Dolores R.

2006 The Origins of Plant Cultivation and Domestication in the Neotropics. In *Behavioral Ecology and the Transition to Agriculture*, edited by Douglas J. Kennett and Bruce Winterhalder, pp. 137-165. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Week 4: Drugs and Alcohol

McGovern, Patrick E.

2009 Excerpt from *Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Schultes, Richard Evan and Albert Hofmann

1979 Excerpt from *Plants of the Gods: Origins of Hallucinogenic Use*. Healing Arts Press, Rochester, VT.

Pollan, Michael

2001 Excerpt from *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*. Random House.

Dietler, Michael

2001 Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts. In *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, edited by Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, pp. 65-114. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

Week 5: Intensive Agriculture in the Ancient World

Parsons, Jeffrey R.

1991 Political Implications of Prehispanic Chinampa Agriculture in the Valley of Mexico. In *Lands and Politics in the Valley of Mexico. A Two Thousand Year Perspective*, edited by H. R. Harvey, pp. 17-42. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Wesson, Cameron B.

1999 Chiefly Power and Food Storage in Southeastern North America. *World Archaeology* 31: 145-164.

Week 6: Other Cultural Uses for Plants

Readings TBD

Week 7: Plants and the Columbian Exchange

Braudel, Fernand

1992 [1981] The Dietary Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century. Excerpt from *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of Possible*. Vol. 1 of *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, pp. 163-172. University of California Press, Berkeley. Moberg, Mark and Sarah Lyon.

Crosby, Alfred W.

1972 Excerpt from *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Week 8: Plants as Commodities

Standage, Tom

2009 Global Highways of Food. In *An Edible History of Humanity*, pp. 63-106. Walker & Co., New York.

McAnany, Patricia A. and Satoru Murata

2007 America's First Connoisseurs of Chocolate. *Food and Foodways* 15: 7-30.

Week 9: Colonialism and Slavery

Dietler, Michael

2007 Culinary Encounters: Food, Identity, and Colonialism. In *The Archaeology of Food and Identity*, edited by Katheryn C. Twiss, pp. 218-242. Center For Archaeological Investigations, Occasional Paper Number 34, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

Mintz, Sidney W.

1985 Excerpt from *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. Penguin Books, New York.

Chapman, Peter

2007 Excerpt from *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*. Canongate.

Week 10: Plants and Globalization

Higman, B. W.

2012 National, Regional, and Global Cuisines. In *How Food Made History*, pp. 161-190. Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Week 11: Trends and Changes in Food Marketing

Pollan, Michael

2006 Big Organic. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, pp. 134-184. Penguin Books, New York.

Moberg, Mark and Sarah Lyon

2010 What's Fair? The Paradox of Seeking Justice through Markets. In *Fair Trade and Social Justice: Global Ethnographies*, edited by Sarah Lyon and Mark Moberg, pp. 1-24. New York University Press, New York.

Week 12: An Insatiable Desire for Plants

Paarlberg, Robert

2005 The Global Food Fight. In *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, 2nd edition, edited by James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell, pp. 276-285. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.