

SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES PROSPECTUS FALL 2024

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

FREN/COML/AFRC 0081-401

DECOLONIZING FRENCH FOOD THROUGH LITERATURE, ART & FILM

Subject to change**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Wine and cheese, baguettes and croissants, multiple courses and fresh ingredients straight from the market—these are the internationally recognized hallmarks of French food. Yet, even as the practices surrounding the mythical French table have been deemed worthy of a place on UNESCO’s World Heritage List since 2010, culinary traditions in France remain persistently rooted in legacies of colonialism that are invisible to many. In order to “decolonize” French food, this seminar turns to art, literature, and film, as well as archival documents such as advertisements, maps, and cookbooks. In what ways do writers and filmmakers use food to interrogate the human, environmental, and cultural toll that French colonialism has taken on the world? How do their references to food demonstrate the complex cultural creations, exchanges, and asymmetries that have arisen from legacies of colonialism? To answer these questions, we will interpret artworks, read literature (in English or in translation), and watch films (subtitled in English) that span the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by authors and directors from across the Francosphere—from Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique in the Caribbean; to Vietnam and the Vietnamese Diaspora; to Central and West Africa.

LINGUISTIC EXPECTATIONS

A knowledge of the French language, while certainly useful, is NOT REQUIRED for this course. All texts will be read in translation and all films will be subtitled in English.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Impart an overview of French colonial, anticolonial, and postcolonial histories that illustrates the complex relations between historical events, artistic production, society, and culture—using food as a lens for our study.
2. Familiarize students with the fundamental intellectual and ethical intersecting debates of critical race, gender, feminist, and postcolonial theories, particularly as these relate to literary and visual analyses and food studies.

3. Build reading and interpretive skills for analyzing visual, filmic, and literary texts through weekly readings coupled with in-class written reflections.
4. Broaden and exercise specific writing and critical-thinking skills through targeted in-class activities based on readings.
5. Practice drafting, time-management, editorial, and presentational skills through the elaboration of three short analytical papers, due in a series of incremental assignments throughout the semester and to be completed in consultation with instructor, as well as with fellow students.
6. Develop research methodologies and citation skills through the elaboration of a one longer, more formal academic paper with a bibliography that expands upon one of the short analytical papers, to be due at the end of the semester.
7. Hone public-speaking and presentational skills through three short presentations throughout the semester, as well as one longer more formal presentation at the course colloquium at the end of the semester.

COURSE STRUCTURE

For the Fall 2024 semester, all sections of the course are scheduled in person. The class will meet twice a week for 90 minutes. The semester-long calendar will be detailed in the course syllabus to be published at a later date. Detailed weekly programs will be posted on Canvas in order to inform students of what they can expect to do every class meeting and what they need to do outside of class meetings (in preparation for class or as post-class assignments). Office hours will be bookable online in order to give everyone more opportunities to receive personal attention.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Engagement and attendance:

Active engagement and participation demonstrates respect for your fellow students, your instructor, and the people whose stories you will learn about this semester, and therefore **your engagement will be assessed every 2 weeks**. It is essential that you attend class, complete reading and media assignments ahead of time, and bring all necessary materials with you to class. You are expected to share your ideas and support them with examples from course assignments. An important aspect of active participation is listening carefully to others, especially when their interpretations of course material differ from your own. If you anticipate that past experiences will inhibit your ability to discuss a specific piece of course content, you are invited to bring up your reservations with the instructor outside of class.

Attendance will be taken for all classes and you may not exceed more than one week or **2 absences**. Tardiness disrupts the flow of the class, therefore **excessive tardies may accrue to an absence**. To receive some credit toward engagement when you are absent,

you are expected to **review** the class work and **complete missing assignments** by the end of the week, as well as **come prepared** for the next class. Please note that absences that exceed the limit may have a negative effect on your final grade. If you are unable to meet these expectations, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible. You **must email your instructor** and report absences by creating an [Absence Notice through Course Action Notices](#) on [Path@Penn](#). For further information regarding attendance, consult the College webpage on Policies Governing Class Attendance: <https://www.college.upenn.edu/attendance>.

Homework Assignments:

For each class, you will be asked to complete short assignments about the reading or the media under study in order to prepare for class discussion. Please see the weekly programs on Canvas for each week's requirements. In almost every case, this will be a note-taking worksheets designed to help you engage critically and thoughtfully with the readings and media assignments. Your notes should be in bullet points in your own writing, so do not write in full sentences and do not copy and paste from external sources. If you consult external sources from the internet, please cite it by including a link in parentheses. Generative AI should not be used as a source here. *You are allowed to skip this assignment two times over the course of the semester.*

In-Class Written Reflections:

At the end of many class sessions, I will ask you to write, by hand, for about 10 minutes about the works we are studying. The purpose of this exercise is to allow you the space to think and write freely, develop your initial thoughts about the work, and try out new ideas. You will have access to your note-taking worksheet as well as the text while you write. *You are allowed to miss or skip this assignment two times over the course of the semester.*

One-on-One Meetings with Prof. Collins:

Periodically throughout the semester, I will invite you to meet with me individually during office hours. The purpose of this meeting is to get to know you, discuss your personal objectives for the course, provide feedback on your progress, and provide you a space to ask questions. Please arrive on time and communicate well in advance if you need to reschedule.

Presentations at the Roundtable Discussion & Short Analytical Papers (3):

Our studies in this course are divided into four units: Food, France and the Colonies; the Francophone Caribbean - Martinique & Guadeloupe; Vietnam and the Vietnamese Diaspora; and Central & West Africa - Senegal, Cameroon & Niger River Delta. At the end of the first three units, we will hold a Roundtable Discussion in class during which you will present your analysis of the texts and themes of the unit in small groups. Then, using the feedback you receive from your peers during the Roundtable Discussion, you will write a Short Analytical Paper (3 pages) which will be due the following weekend. *You are allowed to submit your Short Analytical Paper late one time, up to one week after the original due date. Please email me to let me know.*

Oral Presentation at the Class Colloquium:

Prepare a 5-minute presentation with a Powerpoint on your final research topic to the class and invited guests. This presentation will allow you to showcase your ideas as well as provide you the opportunity to receive feedback from your peers as you write your final research paper.

Final Research Paper:

For your final paper (6-8 pages), you will expand upon one of your short analytical papers by deepening your analysis and making connections across course themes and texts. You will also reference two or three secondary sources to further nuance your argument.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Active Engagement: 15% (allowed to miss class two times)
- Homework Assignments: 15% (allowed to miss or skip two times)
- In-Class Written Reflections: 15% (allowed to miss or skip two times)
- One-on-One Meetings with Prof Collins: 5%
- Presentations at Roundtable Discussions: 15% (5% each)
- Short Analytical Papers: 15% (5% each) (allowed to submit late one time, up to one week)
- Oral Presentation at Class Colloquium: 10%
- Final Research Paper: 10%

COURSE MATERIALS

You will be expected to acquire three books. The total cost for new editions should not exceed \$50 for all three. Used versions of the books will be much less expensive and are perfectly acceptable, though please double-check you are ordering the correct version. The rest of the course materials will be available for download on Canvas. If you have concerns about acquiring course materials, please do not hesitate to let the instructor know.

POSSIBLE COURSE TOPICS**1. Food and Gastronomy in the French Nation**

- Watch: "Le repas gastronomique des Français" / "Gastronomic Meal of the French" (2009) by the Mission Française du Patrimoine et des Cultures Alimentaires

2. Representation, Food, and the Colonies

- Read "Introduction," *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said
- Watch: *La France est un empire* / "France is an empire" (1939) directed by Jean d'Agraives

3. Colonial Foods at Home: Advertising Food and Teaching Race in France

- Read: “‘Y’a bon Banania’: Ethics and cultural criticism in the colonial context” (2000) by Anne Donadey
- Examine: Colonial ephemera archived at Bibliothèque nationale de France, Archives nationales d’outre-mer, and the Getty Research Institute.

4. Literal and Literary Cannibalism in Anticolonial Writings

- Read: *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939) / *Journal of a Homecoming* (2017) by Aimé Césaire, translated by N. Gregson Davis

5. Slavery, Sugar, and the Black Body

- Watch: *Rue Cases-Nègres / Sugar Cane Alley* (1983) by Euzhan Palcy (based on Joseph Zobel’s 1950 novel)
- Examine: “A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby” (2014) by Kara Walker
- Read: “Kara Walker’s Blood Sugar: *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*” (2014) by Valérie Loichot

6. Environmental Devastation and Food Security

- Read: *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972) / *The Bridge of Beyond* (2013) by Simone Schwarz-Bart, translated by Barbara Bray

7. (Post)Colonial Continuities: Food, Servitude, Exploitation

- Read: Excerpts of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1998) by Gayatri Spivak
- Watch: *La Noire de... / Black Girl* (1966) by Ousmane Sembène

8. Postcolonial Cooking and Writing: Women’s Recipistolary Writing

- Read: “Consider the Recipe” (2013) by Kyla Tompkins
- Read: *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* (2006) / *Victoire: My Mother’s Mother* (2014) by Maryse Condé, translated by Richard Philcox

9. Postcolonial Migration and Cultural Creation

- Read: “Métissage et créolisation” (1995) by Édouard Glissant
- Read: *Mãn* (2013/2015) by Kim Thúy, translated by Sheila Fischman