What is "American Studies"? This course introduces undergraduates to a field of study that is not limited to one kind of scholarly approach, but rather is focused on understanding American culture in all of its complexity by examining the American experience from a variety of different perspectives, using a wide range of sources, and using analytical tools used by historians, literary scholars, sociologists, and political scientists.

American Studies as a field is problem based, and in this course, students seek American culture by studying food. The problem, then, is what can food reveal about American culture? How can we study American food culture(s)—what constitutes our archive and our approaches? By studying this aspect of American life, do we ultimately study matters of social and political significance?

Week 1 (August 24-26) “What’s for Dinner”?  
Tuesday: Introduction to American Studies as a field, Syllabus, Assignments, and Course Expectations  
Thursday: American Studies in the twenty-first century at Purdue University  
Read: Paul Lauter, “Reconfiguring Academic Disciplines: The Emergence of American Studies”  
George Lipsitz, "Introduction," from American Studies in a Moment of Danger  

Part I: Food and American Culture: The Local Scene
In Part I of this course, we begin our exploration of American culture through food by studying our local area. The central reading for this part of the course is Elizabeth Engelhardt’s *Republic of Barbecue*, which is the product of a collaboration between Professor Engelhardt and some of her students in response to a request for assistance from the Central Texas Barbecue Association. *Republic of Barbecue* will serve as a model for a similar project to come out of this class—how can we explore Greater Lafayette/Tippecanoe County/North Central Indiana culture through the study of foodways? Collectively and individually, students in AMST 201 will provide one angle of vision on that issue.

Students will identify a subject for the semester project and begin working on it. In addition, students will complete the following two assignments:

1) Co-lead the discussion of one chapter from *The Republic of Barbecue*
2) Prepare a 2-3-page essay on your chapter

---

**Saturday, August 28:** The Smokin’ on Russell Backyard BBQ Blast
- barbecue contest sponsored by the First Baptist Church and Baptist Student Foundation
- Location: 200 Russell Street
- When: tasting begins 8:30 a.m., judging at 12:00, ending at 8:00 p.m.

---

**Week 2 (August 31-September 2)**

**Tuesday:** Food, Culture, American Studies
In class we will discuss the assigned readings and divvy up the readings for next time. Students will lead discussion on Thursday.


**Thursday:** Making Connections between food, stories, and culture
Student presentations—Essays 1-5

**Week 3 (September 7-9)**

**Tuesday:** Making Connections between food, stories, and culture
Student presentations—Essays 6-10

2-3 page papers are due in class for ALL essays

**Thursday:** Making Connections between food, stories, and culture
Student presentations—Essays 11-16

---

**Week 4 (September 14-16)**

**Tuesday:** Local food festivals and Indiana Foodways

**Hand-out:** Feast of the Hunter’s Moon, Apple Popcorn Festival, The Farmers’ Market, and Dia de los Muertos

**Thursday:** Looking ahead to part two and updates on individual projects
Part II: Food and Culture: Multi-Ethnic Americans

In Part II of the course, we will continue our exploration of American culture through food by considering the argument made by Donna Gabaccia in her book, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*. The very title begs an important question: How does “ethnic food” lead to the “making of Americans”? Gabaccia’s argument is one that may provide some students with a framework for their individual projects, and it certainly helps us think about how our individual foodways are inflected by the American experience.

Students will continue working on semester projects during this part of the course. The focus of the next four weeks, however, will be on the relationship between ethnic food and American identity. In addition to reading *We Are What We Eat*, students will complete one written assignment in this part.

1) Keep a Food Diary for a week and write an essay about your eating habits that engages themes in Gabaccia’s book

Week 5 (September 21-23)
Tuesday: National Cuisines in the U.S. and Abroad
Read: Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Introduction and Chapter 1, 1-35.
Assignment: Begin your food diary. Record everything you eat for the next week, keeping a log of items consumed at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. After one week, consider how your eating habits compare with the argument Gabaccia advances in her book.

Thursday: Social relations and American cuisine
Read: Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Chapter 2, 36-63. Be prepared to discuss your favorite “American meal,” where you grew up, how you would situate yourself socially, and with whom in this chapter you most identify.

Week 6 (September 28-30)
Tuesday: The Business of ethnic food
Read: Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Chapter 3, 64-92. Before this class period, perhaps over the weekend, pay a visit to a local Grocery chain (Pay Less or Marsh), and identify at least five items that were produced overseas and how they do/do not fit into “American” cooking.

Thursday: “What’s that on your plate?”
Read: Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Chapter 4, 93-121.
Assignment: You should have completed your food diary by now. What patterns do you notice? Would your eating habits support Gabaccia’s main point or call it into question? Begin working on a paper, 3-4 pages in length, about your eating habits. Be...
sure to give your paper a title and attach your eating log at the end. Paper will be due: Thursday, October 14.

**Saturday and Sunday, October 2-3:** The Feast of the Hunter’s Moon
--Reenactment and Living History of Fort Ouiatenon
--Location: Fort Ouiatenon on South River Road, West Lafayette
--When: 9-5 on Saturday; 9-4 on Sunday

Week 7 (October 5-7)
Tuesday: Food Values
**Read:** Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Chapter 5, 122-48; Michelle Obama, “A Food Bill We Need,” August 2, 2010.

Thursday: Food as Big Business
**Read:** Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Chapter 6, 149-74.

Week 8 (October 12-14)
Tuesday: NO CLASS—O C T O B E R    B R E A K

Thursday: Cookbooks and American Identity
**Read:** Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, Chapters 7-8, Conclusion, 175-232
**Assignment due:** Food Diary and Essay

Part III: Immigrants and Their Food in the U.S.
While Part II focused on the impact of immigrants on American foodways and culture, this part will focus on the impact of America on immigrants. The central reading is *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* by Hasia Diner. Diner taps a wide range of sources, to figure out what immigrants thought about food and eating in America. The immigrant experience laid the foundation for an “American” experience of food for the next generation.

Students will continue working on the semester projects, but will complete the following shorter assignments as well:
1) Visit a niche grocery and prepare a participant/observer ethnographic essay. What do you see in the store—the products, their arrangement, people working, people shopping, the neighborhood, and décor? How does the store contribute to the American scene? Does it help you understand better the experience of non-native-born Americans?
2) Students will be divided into three groups—one leading the discussion of chapters 2 and 3 on the Italian experience, one leading the discussion of chapters 4 and 5 on the Irish experience, and one leading the discussion of chapters 6 and 7 on the Jewish experience. How would the descendants of the group you are studying eat in the Lafayette/West Lafayette community—do any markets or restaurants cater to their dietary preferences? In other words relate the experience of Italians, the Irish, or Jews as described in *Hungering for America* to their descendants in our community.

Week 9 (October 19-21)
Tuesday: Eating or Starving in the Old Country and the New World

Saturday and Sunday, October 2-3: The Feast of the Hunter’s Moon
--Reenactment and Living History of Fort Ouiatenon
--Location: Fort Ouiatenon on South River Road, West Lafayette
--When: 9-5 on Saturday; 9-4 on Sunday
**Read:** Diner, *Hungering for America*, Chapter 1, 1-20. This chapter provides an overview for the study, which then turns to the specific experience of Italian, Irish, and Jewish migrants to the U.S. Students will sign up for one of three sections of the book and to serve as discussion leaders/resource people for the class.

**Assignment:** In order to gain a firsthand perspective on the immigrant experience and food, you are asked to visit a niche grocery in the community. While you are there, you should make note of specifics so that you will be able to offer convincing evidence of the conclusions you reach about the store. Prepare a 2-4-page essay about the grocery store you visited, linking your observations and experience to the themes of Diner’s *Hungering for America*. The paper will be due in class on Thursday, November 11, in class.

Thursday: Class time will be devoted to group work—decide on a presentation format, research assignments, and themes you can present in class.

**Read:** Begin reading your chapters and researching your group’s experience in this community.

---

**Week 10 (October 26-28)**

**Tuesday:** Italians in America, or Is Fazoli’s Real Italian Real Fast Really?

**Group 1:** Present the experience of Italians

Thursday: Class will not meet today; groups 2 and 3 can work on presentations; group 1 can focus on the second paper.

---

**Week 11 (November 2-4)**

**Tuesday:** Irish in America, or Is Every Day St. Patrick’s Day?

**Group 2:** Present the experience of Irish immigrants

Thursday: Jews in America, or Is America the “Promised Land”?

**Group 3:** Present the experience of Jewish Immigrants

---

**Week 12 (November 9-11)**

**Tuesday:** Are Ethnic Immigrants Americans after all?


Thursday: Discussion of ethnic niche groceries and American culture. Papers on your visit to a niche grocery are due in class.

---

**Part IV: The Politics of Food and American Culture**

The final part of this course revolves around the ways that the politics of food can reveal important dimensions of American culture. By “politics of food,” I am referring to power struggles centered on food consumption, food production, and who gains/loses in modern food production. Upton Sinclair’s famous novel, *The Jungle*, will help us identify key issues in political struggles over food; it played an important role at the
dawn of the twentieth century in assigning the responsibility for overseeing the food supply to various levels of government. Contemporaries credited Sinclair with single-handedly creating the will to craft and pass the Pure Food and Drug Act as well as the Meat Inspection Act. But, of course, the politics did not end with the passage of those laws.

The novel will provide some structure for the last part of the course as well several recent documentary films that explore current “food fights” in America. We will also use some class periods to wrap up the presentation of semester projects. The semester project will be due on Thursday, December 2.

The only assignment for this part of the course is a 2-4 page essay comparing The Jungle, as a documentary, to one of the documentary films we will be viewing in class. Your essay will focus on how the political issues related to food have changed (or not) over the course of the past century.

Week 13 (November 16-18)
Tuesday: The American Dream of Jurgis Rudkus

Thursday: Class will not meet until after Thanksgiving. Finish reading The Jungle by Tuesday, November 30

Week 14 (November 23-25)
Tuesday: No Class meeting today.
Thursday: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15 (November 30-December 2)
Tuesday: If The Jungle were a movie….
Discussion will focus on the main dramatic lines of the novel. It is a “documentary” similar to the ones we will watch for the remainder of the course.

Thursday: Food and the Obesity Crisis in America
View Super Size Me in class

Week 16 (December 7-9)
Tuesday: American Food Policy—when is Government intervention too much? Too little?
View King Corn in class

Thursday: Food Production
View The Garden in class

Assignments and Grading
Presentation and 2-3 page paper on Republic of Barbecue = 10%
Group Presentation on Hungering for America = 10%
3-4 page Food Diary Paper = 10%
2-4 page Niche Grocery Paper = 20%
The Jungle and a Documentary paper = 20%
Semester Project 6-10 page paper = 30%

Grades range from A to F with pluses and minuses. The final grade in the course will be calculated by multiplying the number value of each grade by the percentage it represents in the overall course grade and adding the weighted grades together.

A+ = 12
A  = 11
A- = 10
B+ = 9
B  = 8
B- = 7
C+ = 6
C  = 5
C- = 4
D+ = 3
D  = 2
D- = 1
F  = 0

What do grades reflect?

A = Your essay reflects careful reading and accurate reporting and links readings to lecture material and to each other. You have successfully placed specific information in a historical context. Your essay is coherent and grammatically correct. When applicable, you have correctly identified the author’s thesis or main point and you have considered how the author has assembled evidence to support the thesis or main point. For an A+ you have done all of this and added a particularly original insight or analysis of your own.

A- or B+ = Your work is very good, generally displaying a careful reading, accurate reporting, and linkages between different kinds of material. Your essay is well-written and contains relatively few grammatical mistakes. When applicable, you have correctly identified the author’s thesis or main point and you have considered the author’s use of evidence to support the thesis or main point. Your essay is not quite as polished as an “A” essay, and you have not discussed quite as many aspects of the issue, and it is clearly better than a “B” essay. You are beginning to show mastery of historical analysis and writing.

B = Your essay is good, but somewhat incomplete—either you are not reading carefully and thoroughly, or your essay does not make many linkages among course materials. Most of the time you place specific information in the proper historical context, but you sometimes project the contemporary context onto the past or offer opinions that do not reflect an appreciation of the “pastness” of the past. When applicable you have identified the author’s main point, but your discussion of the evidence or the thesis is a bit vague. Your essay has grammatical and organizational problems, which makes it
less compelling. But you are beginning to show an appreciation of historical analysis and writing.

B- or C+ = Your work is OK—better than average—but not quite as carefully and accurately done as “B” work. Your work makes some linkages among course materials and some of the time you place specific information in the proper historical context. You may tend to project the contemporary context onto the past or offer opinions that do not reflect an appreciation of the “pastness” of the past. You may have some difficulty identifying the author’s main point, although you do recognize some of the subpoints. Your discussion of the book—its thesis and evidence—is a bit vague. Your essay has grammatical and organizational problems. You are beginning to show an appreciation of historical analysis and writing. Overall, your work is not quite at the “B” level, but it is better than “C” work.

C = Your essay is clearly “passable,” but it shows lack of attention to specific details and makes few linkages among course materials. You tend to “report” rather than “analyze” materials, so most of what appears in your essay is not incorrect, but it does not perform some of the basic work historians do as they encounter original materials or the interpretive work of other historians. You have difficulty identifying the author’s main point, some of your information is inaccurate, and you do not demonstrate that you have read the assigned readings carefully or, perhaps, you have not understood what you read. Your discussions are vague, and grammatical and organizational problems make it difficult to discern what you are trying to get across. You tend to project the contemporary context onto the past or offer opinions that reflect an unwillingness to understand the past on its own terms. You struggle with historical analysis and writing.

C- or D+ = Your work is still clearly in the passing range, but is marked by numerous problems that demonstrate a lack of effort, care, and/or understanding. Some of your references are incorrect, and you make even fewer linkages among course materials than a “C” paper. Grammatical and organizational problems mar your work. You miss the main point of an author’s work when you are asked to identify it, and you neglect discussions of specific issues or evidence. You offer opinions that do not show a great awareness of historical contexts, and you tend to project the contemporary outlook onto the past. You have shown little evidence of understanding historical analysis and writing.

D = Your work indicates that you are not devoting much time to this course. You include inaccurate information, offer little specific detail, and/or write essays that reflect next to nothing from lectures or other course readings. You do not understand the author’s main point and do not discuss the evidence used to support it. Your writing contains numerous grammatical and organizational problems, and it is difficult to see what you are trying to say. You make no effort to situate subjects in a historical context, instead relying on your own uninformed opinions or simply asserting that it happened in the past. You have shown little evidence of understanding historical analysis and writing.
D- = Your work is barely passing. You have turned in assignments, but they show almost no care or effort, are filled with inaccuracies, and betray a failure to read course materials or to attend class lectures carefully and attentively. Your essays are riddled with problems that reflect difficulty with basic communication, or your work is so thin, you have not given readers enough to evaluate what you may have gotten from course materials. You have shown no evidence of understanding historical analysis and writing. (I have never given an F+.)

F = You have to work very deliberately to earn an “F” in this course. You neglect turning in written work, your discussions are sketchy and unrelated to course materials. The writing is nearly impenetrable, because it is seriously flawed by grammatical and organizational errors. You show no evidence of having read the books, attended lectures, or both.

Attendance Policy
Attendance will be taken every class period. Poor attendance will not result in grade reduction, but outstanding attendance (3 or fewer absences through the semester) may result in enhancement of your final grade.

Academic Honesty
Your essays in this course must be your own work. If you copy someone else’s work—And that includes copying and pasting information from the Internet, Wikipedia, on-line essays, etc.—or take the main ideas and change a few words here and there, you will be guilty of plagiarism.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course—it is considered a form of academic dishonesty. When it happens purposefully, it means that you are taking someone else’s work and passing it off as your own; such intellectual thievery is unacceptable. Penalties for plagiarism may range from the failure of an assignment to failure of the class and notification of the Dean.

If you copy from a classmate, I will be unable to determine who actually did the work and who copied; therefore, if any instances come to my attention, I will assume both parties have engaged in academic dishonesty.

If you have a question about how to use the work of other scholars (not classmates), when to quote, when to paraphrase, or how to cite previous scholarship, please consult me.

Pandemic Policy
In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor’s control. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course.

See the Blackboard page for this course.
Contact Professor Curtis via email: curtis@purdue.edu
Contact Professor Curtis via telephone:  Office:  494-4159

Course and Instructor Evaluation
During the last two weeks of the semester, you will be provided an opportunity to evaluate this course and your instructor. To this end, Purdue has transitioned to online course evaluations. On Monday of the fifteenth week of classes, you will receive an official email from evaluation administrators with a link to the online evaluation site. You will have two weeks to complete this evaluation. Your participation in this evaluation is an integral part of this course. Your feedback is vital to improving education at Purdue University. I strongly urge you to participate in the evaluation system.