

Food Studies Programs at Universities

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At its very basic, food studies is the study of food on an academic level, separate from the teaching of culinary arts and general cooking. Currently, food studies refer to the scholarly study of food through various angles involving the humanities and social sciences. The natural sciences, like food science, nutrition and agriculture, are still studied (like at Cornell University's Masters/PhD Food Science program), but even more synonymous with food studies is a multi-disciplinary approach to the field. This involves subjects like history, sociology, cultural studies, communication, anthropology, ethnography, psychology and more.

In the 1950s and 60s, food studies narrowly referred to natural sciences, such as food science, agriculture, and nutrition. Outside of the realm of health and science, many scholars did not feel food was a worthy subject of study. Some felt like food could not be a scholarly subject because it was taken for granted, or was often associated with women, and other scholars did not understand how many different ways food impacts the world. These ideas have shifted from the 1970s to the present, as did America's relationship with food, which went from consumption for survival to consumption for pleasure. The country's thoughts about food shifted from quick convenience items and gelatin molds to celebrity chefs, cookbooks and food television shows.

Within the food studies field, variations exist between program structures and teaching methods. School food studies programs can range from scholarly to more informal, from full out doctoral degree programs like at New York University-Steinhardt, to just a few classes tucked away in another discipline, like at the University of Maryland and the University of California-Davis American Studies programs. Concentrations differ depending on the school, but most programs are centered in the field of humanities and social sciences. Some subjects may be studied on their own, like in the MA in Anthropology of Food program at University of London, School of Oriental & African Studies, or in combination with one another, which is common in programs with "food studies" or "gastronomy" in the title, such as The Boston University Masters in Gastronomy program. Many food studies programs within the United States focus on food production (such as sustainable agriculture and food policy), food consumption (food culture, psychology, etc.) or a combination of the two.

The Boston University Masters in Gastronomy program is considered to be one of the oldest in the country. It was created by Julia Childs and Jacques Pepin in the late 1980s before formally becoming a program in 1992. New York University-Steinhardt followed suit in 1996 by offering a Bachelor, Master and Doctorate in Food Studies. Even though both universities are teaching the same topic, Boston University's master program offers at least one 4 month hands on cooking class and multiple wine studies classes, while The NYU Master program skips the cooking but includes access to multiple seminars, talks and discussions with international scholars that deal with food policy and nutrition, as it shares a department with Nutrition and

Public Health. The University of New Hampshire launched a dual bachelor degree program in Eco-gastronomy, which will include more hands-on classes covering nutrition, sustainable agriculture and hospitality management.

Chatham University is one of the first food studies programs to have a full-working farm, partly to support the school's long dedication to environmental awareness, as well as to give the food studies students hands-on lessons about sustainable agriculture. Some schools, like the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy include culinary tourism as a focus in their food studies program, which allows students to learn tourism practices while experiencing them first hand within the country.

Formal school programs are not the only way food studies have made it into colleges and universities. Although they do not have a formal food studies program, Sterling College in Vermont is offering a new summer class that is more of a hands-on approach to learning farm to table food systems, all while utilizing and learning from local food producers and farmers. Yale University is another school that does not have an official food studies program, but does have the Yale Sustainable Food Project. The Project has inspired multiple food and agricultural classes to be added to various programs, it supports academic exploration of food and agriculture, it runs an organic farm on campus and participates in a sustainable dining program at the school.

As the importance of food in academic programs has risen, so have the venues for which to display academic food studies. There has been a proliferation of food-related associations, like The Association for the Study of Food and Society, and the Culinary Historian Society which has many chapters around the country. There are also the countless food-focused conferences and symposiums around the world, like the Oxford Symposium of Food and Cookery. There are old and new journals about the study of food, such as *Food and Foodways*; *Food, Culture and Society* and *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, some more academic and others more accessible to a larger audience.

Food studies books are being published more and more, ranging in subjects from food and identity with Jeffrey Pilcher's *A Que Vivan Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*, to *Food Politics* by Marion Nestle, from American food history and nutrition in Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* to being a responsible, sustainable eater in Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma & In Defense of Food*. Several food-focused encyclopedias have been published over the last 15 years, and this, combined with all the previously mentioned venues for food studies further support the idea that food can and is being studied in a serious nature from a variety of subject angles.

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