Program: CET Vietnam: Development Studies  
Course Title: Food, Culture, and Identity in Southeast Asia  
Course Code: VS240  
Total Hours: 45  
Recommended Credits: 3  
Suggested Cross Listings: Anthropology, Sociology, Asian Studies, International Studies  
Language of Instruction: English  
Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description
What we consume connects us to the worlds of both nature and culture. Bodily and socially, “you are what you eat,” but if your well-being suffers, you often seek out other ingestible substances to restore it. In many times and places, changing what you eat is thought to be healing, while in other times and places drugs – either remedial or recreational – are thought to be distinct from foods and more immediately restorative. Few human interactions with the larger world are more important or interesting than how comestibles and medicines have been discovered, distinguished, mixed, transformed, and distributed, and how those processes have changed humanity.

How does “what you eat” tell us “what you are”? Why are food metaphors so prevalent in societies around the world? What insights can an anthropological focus on food yield about individuals, societies, and humanity? What can we know about our connection to food in evolutionary and historical perspective? In this course we consider how our relationships with food shape our physical environment, how that environment influences us (and “who we are”), and the roles food plays in shaping identity. We explore key topics on food in Vietnam and Southeast Asia and beyond – including human experiences of food and nutrition, past and present foodways, and how those experiences and foodways are shaped by the interplay of language, culture, ecology, history, politics, and technology in cross-cultural and globalized settings.

Objectives
Through this course, students:
- Learn to think critically about how our relationships with food shape our physical environment, and how that environment influences us
- Develop an ethnographic sensibility toward understanding food and identity
- Explore key topics on food in Vietnam and Southeast Asia

Course Requirements
This course gives context for many day-to-day experiences in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian contexts. Seminars, lectures, and student projects focus on the global relevance of food issues encountered in Vietnamese daily cultural environments and the SE Asia region as a whole.
This course is conducted in a seminar format, in addition to lectures. Active participation is essential. Students are expected to attend each class and field trip, to come to class adequately prepared to discuss readings and research, and to turn in assignments well-prepared and on time. Course readings average around 50 pages per session and may be modified according to student research interests. Weekly readings are not long, but they require concentration and effort. In class, we present and discuss readings and your own work. We routinely use the 'Socratic method' in class discussion to foster collaborative, creative thinking.

The short essays provide further opportunities to raise questions, discuss new theories, and connect readings to previous field trips and classes. We discuss your fieldwork exercises during the seminar after you briefly present them in class.

At the end of the semester, you write a focused research essay on a food-culture-society topic of your choosing (10 double-spaced pages, or ~ 2500 words). Paper topics are discussed in advance. You consult relevant secondary sources and conduct basic fieldwork, such as surveys, personal interviews, or case studies. Final papers need to be polished, and describe how you dealt with language and methodological challenges when conducting research.

**Methods of Evaluation**

Grades are determined as follows:
- Short essay #1: Food (10%)
- Short essay #2: Culture (10%)
- Short essay #3: Society (10%)
- Final research paper (40%)
- Class participation (30%)

All CET programs and courses use this grading scale.

A: 100-93%  C+: 77-79%
A-: 90-92%  C: 73-76%
B+: 87-89% D+: 70-72%
B: 83-86% D: 67-69%
B-: 80-82% D-: 66-60%
F: 59% and below

**Primary Texts**


*Purity and Danger* (London: Ark 1984), Mary Douglas

Outline of Course Content
We cover approximately one theme every two weeks. The order of topics and readings may vary slightly according to your research interests and field visits. Readings are available both electronically and in printed format.

THEME 1: Overview of Food, Culture, and Society in Vietnam

THEME 2: A (not-so-brief) History of Cuisine and Empire

THEME 3: Anthropology of Food – Place, Power, Positioning

THEME 4: Food, Medicine, and Health in Southeast Asia

THEME 5: Food, Medicine, and Health in Vietnam