

Cornbread Nation
Instructor: Ashley Rose Young

Have you ever stepped back from a meal and thought about the history behind it? How the preparation of a dish is passed down from generation to generation? How community traditions and ancestral heritage contribute to the selection of ingredients and implementation of cooking techniques? Or how both local and global cultures shape the ways that we experience, write about, and remember food? These are all pressing questions that inform the trajectory of this course and its exploration of food cultures in the American South.

In this class, writing, cooking, and tasting, among the other senses, are the modes through which we will critically engage with Southern food cultures. With our senses as our guides, we will practice several types of writing styles and research methods, including journaling, blogging, creative writing, oral history, and archival work. Students will spend ~2 hour/week in Durham and its neighboring communities observing how food is locally produced, distributed, and consumed. Sites of inquiry and observation include the Durham Farmers' Market and local eateries where we will meet with farmers, chefs, and other food entrepreneurs. To bridge writing and consumption practices, students will keep a Food Culture Journal as they observe food cultures in our community, revising certain entries to publish on our class blog. In order to practice journalistic research and writing, each student will conduct an oral history and create multi-media profile of a local farmer or chef that will also live on our class blog.

In addition to engaging with our contemporary food scene, we will also examine the history of Southern cooking through archival research. Students will contribute to the [Rubenstein Library Test Kitchen Blog](#) by choosing a recipe from the library's historic Southern cookbook collection, researching its origins, preparing the dish, and sharing those experiences through a post rich with descriptive writing and illustrative photographs. Building upon this archival research and culinary experimentation, we will visit the Duke Campus Farm to work with Saskia Cornes, the Farm Manager, where we will learn to plant, raise, harvest, and cook antebellum North Carolina foods. Students will conduct research in the Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library to historically contextualize their experiences at the farm. Students will craft an essay of 750 words that uses one sense (seeing, tasting, touching, hearing, smelling) to capture the experience of tending to crops and laboring at the farm. Our final trip to the farm will be a potluck where we harvest heirloom fruits, vegetables, and grains and prepare an antebellum meal together. The course will culminate in a final project, which builds on independent writing done throughout the semester (including a research proposal and multiple peer-reviewed drafts), and also strengthens the research and observation skills acquired during the semester, leading up to a 2,000 to 2,500-word paper.