

This syllabus will be revised by March 1, 2026.

Title of the course:

2023-10-03

Sociology of Food in Sweden

Instructor:

Nicklas Neuman, PhD, Associate Professor

Course Description:

Food and eating are omnipresent in our society. As social phenomena, they can guide our understanding for human decision making, the social organization of everyday life, differences in behavior among social groups, status and prestige between paid and unpaid work, relations of consumption and production, the construction of ethnic and national identities, and more.

In this course we will take our departure in sociology—the science of social phenomena—in order to examine food and eating in the Swedish society, both past and present.

Attention will be given to basic sociological concepts applied to Swedish politics, history, and culture, all analyzed through the lens of food and eating. We will focus on six domains:

1. The everyday life of individuals, i.e., their eating patterns, domestic foodwork, and family lives.
2. Commensality and eating alone, particularly with a focus on Swedish sociality and the notion of “lonely Swedes.”
3. Differences in eating patterns and diet-related health among social groups (e.g. gender and social class).
4. The welfare state, such as meals in schools and the eldercare.
5. National, regional and ethnic identities related to food culture.
6. Environmental politics, with a consumption-sociological perspective on Swedish consumption patterns and climate change.

Pre-requisite: one course in Sociology, Anthropology, or Public Policy.

General Classroom Norms:

The classroom is a space for open academic discussion where ideas are allowed to be expressed freely, but always in a reciprocally courteous and respectful manner. Class-participation assessments are based not only on how often and well students speak out on the class material, but also on how well they listen to each other. Students are also expected to come to class prepared, having read the readings due and have questions or comments prepared in advance.

Regular attendance is mandatory. An unexcused absence may negatively affect your final grade. Your grade will not be affected if you miss a class due to illness or in the case of a (documented) emergency situation. If you have a personal or family event that conflicts with a class, and cannot be re-scheduled, you may ask your instructor for an excused absence. Such a request should be made at least one week prior to the class in question

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Having successfully finished this course, the student is expected to demonstrate an understanding in:

- ...how basic sociological concepts can be applied to food-related social phenomena in the Swedish culture and society, in the present and in the past.
- ...historical change in, and sociological explanations of, social differentiation of food consumption and (paid and unpaid) foodwork between individuals and groups.
- ...the role and historical development of the welfare state in public-health policies and public-meal provision.
- ...how Swedish politics in the present and the past, such as environmental policies and gender-equality policies, are connected with contemporary food-related phenomena.
- ...how food is a means to construct regional, ethnic and national identities.

Grading:

Specific focus in the grading will be on (1) demonstrated knowledge about historical and social change in Sweden, in relation to food in the Swedish society and culture, (2) critical scientific reasoning (in speech and writing) about course literature and in assignments, (3) understanding of theoretical concepts and how they might relate to each other, and (4) the use of academic language (in speech and writing).

<i>Graded activity</i>	<i>Percentage of total grade</i>
Class participation:	10%
Submission of small assignments	15%
PowerPoint presentation about food, media and marketing	10%
Mid-term paper	25%
Research Paper	40%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A = excellent work reflecting a mastery of assigned tasks and classroom discussions (90-100% achievement of learning outcomes)• B = very good work but still lacking something (80-90% achievement of learning outcomes)• C = average work reflecting the minimal effort/competence/knowledge (70-80% achievement of learning outcomes)• D = below average work showing little effort/competence/knowledge (65-70% achievement of learning outcomes)• F = poor and unacceptable level of effort/competence/knowledge (less than 65% achievement of learning outcomes)	

Week One (August 29)**Title:**

The sociology of food and eating: Introduction

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Course information and presentations of yourselves
- A brief history of sociological research about food
- A round of presentations about your submitted assignment and discussions in groups about why food may be interesting from a human-scientific (social sciences and humanities) perspective

Readings:

- Colás, A., Edwards, J., Levi, J., & Zubaida, S. (2018). *Introduction: Food, Drink, and Modern Social Theory*. In: *Food, Politics, and Society* (1 ed., pp. 1-20). Oakland: University of California Press. Available on shared drive.
- Murcott, A. (2019). Introduction: Sociology, food and eating. In: *Introducing the Sociology of Food and Eating* (pp. 1-28). London: Bloomsbury Academic. Available on shared drive.
- Bååth, J. & Neuman, N. (2021). Social lens or inherently social phenomenon? The study of food in Swedish sociology. *Current Sociology*. DOI: 10.1177/00113921211048520. Available on shared drive.

Assignment:

Before this classroom session, you will have submitted a short introduction about yourself, including (1) previous academic background, (2) the reason(s) for taking this course, (3), your expectations of the course, and (4) why you think that your previous knowledge, life experiences, interestes, and so forth can contribute to making the course better. Each student will also briefly summarize her/his text to the class.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on August 28.

Required length of text: 200-400 words (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

Week Two (September 5).**Title:**

Social-group differentiation, food and health inequities

Location:

Room 975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Possibility for questions and clarifications about the course so far
- Swedish political history – public health, food, and social equality
- Class, gender, and ethnic differentiations of eating patterns
- The gendered division of domestic foodwork
- Time for questions and discussions about public health, food and social differentiation in Sweden

Readings:

- Flemmen, M., Hjellbrekke, J., & Jarness, V. (2018). Class, Culture and Culinary Tastes: Cultural Distinctions and Social Class Divisions in Contemporary Norway. *Sociology*, 52(1), 128-149. Available on shared drive.
- Makenzius, M., E. Skoog-Garås, N. Lindqvist, M. Forslund, and A. Tegnell. (2019). Health disparities based on neighbourhood and social conditions: Open Comparisons—an indicator-based comparative study in Sweden. *Public Health*, 174, 97-101. Available on shared drive.
- Neuman, N. (2020). Foodwork as the new fathering: Change and stability in men's Housework. *Culture Unbound*, 12(3), 527-549. Available on shared drive.

Assignment:

1. Before this classroom session, you will have submitted a personal reflection on the readings. You are not expected to review methods, findings, theoretical arguments etc., only to briefly summarize (1) what you have learned, (2) what you found most interesting, and (3) something that you would like to criticize. Please feel free to strengthen your criticism with other sources. In addition to this, you should also (4) formulate a question about your ideas about public health, food, and social differentiation of eating patterns and foodwork in Sweden, that could be raised for discussion in the group.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on September 4.

Required length of text: 300-500 words (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

2. After this classroom session, you will visit a public space for eating. It can be a fika with friends, a café, a restaurant, or something else where you either eat with others or eat alone “out in the open.” Write a short reflection about how you interpret Swedish sociality around food, and if you like, Swedish food itself. It is up to you if you want to focus more on Swedish food – what is actually eaten – or on the social occasion as such. Let your personal interest guide you! For further details about the submission, see instructions below (Week Three).

Week Three (September 12).**Title:**

Commensality: Eating together, eating alone and #swedengate

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- The concept of commensality and the sociality of eating
- Is it better to eat together?
- Is it bad to eat alone?
- Do Swedes eat together?
- Are Swedish people lonely?
- Time for group discussions about your assignments
- Time for classroom discussions about what was discussed in groups

Readings:

- Ruddock, H. K., Brunstrom, J. M., Vartanian, L. R., & Higgs, S. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the social facilitation of eating. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 110(4), 842-861. DOI: 10.1093/ajcn/nqz155. Available on shared drive.
- Jönsson, H., Michaud, M., & Neuman, N. (2021) What is commensality? A critical discussion of an expanding research field. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(12), 6235. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18126235. Available on shared drive.
- d'Hombres, B., Barjaková, M., & Schnepf, S. (2021). Loneliness and Social Isolation: An Unequally Shared Burden in Europe. IZA Discussion Paper No. 14245, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3823612>. Also available on shared drive.

Assignment:

1. Before this classroom session, you will have submitted a personal reflection on the readings. You are not expected to review methods, findings, theoretical arguments etc., only to briefly summarize (1) what you have learned, (2) what you found most interesting, and (3) something that you would like to criticize. Please feel free to strengthen your criticism with other sources.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on September 11.

Required length of text: 300-500 words (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

2. Before this classroom session, you have also submitted a short reflection your interpretation of Swedish sociality around food (see instructions above for Week Two).

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on September 11.

Required length of text: 400-600 words (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

Week Four (September 19).**Title:**

Food and the welfare state: Eating and foodwork in the public sector

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Introduction to mid-term assignment
- Developments of public foodservice in Sweden
- Welfare state politics
- Examples from studies of Swedish public-meal foodservice today
- Time for questions and discussions

Readings:

- Gullberg, E. (2006). Food for Future Citizens: School Meal Culture in Sweden. *Food, Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 9(3), 337-343. DOI: 10.2752/155280106778813279. Available on shared drive.
- Mattsson Sydner, Y., & Fjellström, C. (2007). Illuminating the (non-)meaning of food: organization, power and responsibilities in public elderly care – a Swedish perspective. *Journal of Foodservice*, 18(3), 119-129. DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-4506.2007.00056.x. Available on shared drive.
- Lundborg, P., Rooth, D-O., & Alex-Petersen, J. (2021). Long-Term Effects of Childhood Nutrition: Evidence from a School Lunch Reform. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 89(2), 876-908. DOI: 10.1093/restud/rdab028. Available on shared drive.

Assignment:

1. Before this classroom session, you will have submitted a personal reflection about food provision in the public sector. You do not need to write about the readings explicitly, but you are expected to formulate two questions for discussion in groups, and this requires that you have read. For example, do you consider tax-subsidized meals a right or a privilege? Should the ambition be only nutritional or are there other food-related values of relevance? Could the same system work in the United States?

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on September 18.

Required length of text: 200-300 words (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

2. After this classroom session, you are expected to do execute your mid-term assignment, in the form of a short interview with a person born and raised in Sweden about food in the public sector. It can be about pre-school, ground-school, hospitals, the eldercare, and even prison. It can be based on her/his own experience or that of a friend, family member, etc.

The interview can be in the form of both text conversations (E-mail, Facebook messenger, etc.) and recorded face-to-face conversations. If you choose the latter, you do not have to transcribe anything except for direct quotations.

Required format: You should ask at least four questions, with at least one focusing on how they view the public meal as part of Swedish society and culture.

Week Five (September 26)

Title:

Food and national identity: Gastronationalism, cuisine, and culinary Nordicness/Swedishness

Location:

1. Room A975a
2. Stockholm city

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Introduction to your fieldwork assignment
- Basic concepts: nation as “imagined community” and “banal nationalism”
- What is “cuisine”?
- Research on food and national identity
- On the concept of “gastronationalism”?
- New Nordic Cuisine
- “Sweden – The new culinary nation”
- The Swedish Government’s “food strategy”
- City walk – Some gastronomic landmarks of Stockholm

Readings:

- DeSoucey, M. (2010). Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union. *American Sociological Review*, 75(3), 432-455. Available on shared drive.
- Leer, J. (2016). The rise and fall of the New Nordic Cuisine. *Aesthetics and Culture*, 8. Available on shared drive.
- Jönsson, H. (2020). A Food Nation Without Culinary Heritage? Gastronationalism in Sweden. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, 4(4), 223-237. doi:10.3727/216929720X15846938924076. Available on shared drive.

Assignment:

After this classroom session, each group will carry out a minor fieldwork about food in Swedish marketing and/or media and how this relates to their interpretations of the Swedish people, society, or culture. The discussion does not have to be “scientific” in the sense that your interpretations need support by data.

Required format of presentation: A ten minutes long presentation in PowerPoint (or similar software), where each student should take part, plus five minutes for questions and comments from the audience.

Optional props: If you want to, it is also okay to complement your presentation with props of different kinds (e.g. food packages or products, magazines, leaflets, something to eat, etc.).

Week Six (October 3)**Title:**

Food consumption and climate change: The connection between Swedish environmental politics, food policy and food consumption

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Food and climate effects, a crash course
- Swedish food-consumption patterns and climate change
- Swedish environmental politics
- Consumption-sociological perspectives on sustainable consumption and behavioral-change policies
- Time for questions and discussions about readings

Readings:

- Geels, F. W., McMeekin, A., Mylan, J., & Southerton, D. (2015). A critical appraisal of Sustainable Consumption and Production research: The reformist, revolutionary and reconfiguration positions. *Global Environmental Change*, 34, 1-12. Available on shared drive.
- Rööös, E. et al. (2021). Policy Options for Sustainable Food Consumption – Review and Recommendations for Sweden. Mistra Sustainable Consumption report 1:10. Gothenburg: Chalmers university of Technology.
- **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, INTRODUCTION, AND SECTION 3:** Willett et al. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet*, 393(10170), 447-492. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4. Available on shared drive.

Mid-term assignment:

1. Before the classroom session, you will have submitted your mid-term paper about Swedish public meals. It should include (1) a presentation of the interview subject (although no names!), (2) what you chose to interview her/him about and why, (3) a summary of your conversation (supported with quotes), and (4) a final reflection, based on your own interview findings and the readings, about public-sector meals in Sweden.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on October 2.

Required length of text: 1000-1200 words, EXCLUDING quotes (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

2. You will also bring at least two questions to class (these need NOT be submitted beforehand), based on your readings, about what you think about social change, political and private responsibility, consumer and commercial power etc. in relation to food and the environment. What is a reasonable way forward? On whose shoulders lie the responsibility? What can governments do, and *should* they do anything? Is food even a meaningful target for climate policy? Feel free to ask provocative questions, as long as they can be discussed academically (see “General Classroom Norms” above).

Week Seven (October 10):**Title:**

Media and marketing: The Swedish society through the lens of food

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Introduction to your Research Papers
- Group presentations: 10 minutes for presentation + 5 minutes for questions and comments from the audience
- Time for discussion about readings

Readings:

- Gunnarsson, A., & Elam, M. (2012). Food Fight! The Swedish Low-Carb/High Fat (LCHF) Movement and the Turning of Science Popularisation Against the Scientists. *Science as Culture*, 21(3), 315-334. doi:10.1080/09505431.2011.632000. Available on shared drive.
- Falkheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2015). Trust and Brand Recovery Campaigns in Crisis: Findus Nordic and the Horsemeat Scandal. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 9(2), 134-147. doi:10.1080/1553118X.2015.1008636. Available on shared drive.
- van Hooft, J., Patterson, C., Löf, M., Alexandrou, C., Hilton, S., & Nimegeer, A. (2018). Media Framing and Construction of Childhood Obesity: A Content Analysis of Swedish Newspapers. *Obesity Science & Practice*, 4(1), 4-13. Available on shared drive.

Assignment:

After this classroom session, you will submit an abstract for your Research Paper. The abstract should include (1) a very brief background, (2) your research questions, (3) your study aim, (4) your methodology, (5) and the expected knowledge contribution from your work.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on October 12.

Required length of text: 150-400 words, not including references (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

Week Eight (October 17)**Title:**

Feedback session for Research Paper

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00

Themes:

- Time for questions about the Research Paper assignment
- Brief progress reports followed by comments from the audience and discussions about the different paper projects

Readings:

- Submitted abstracts from the students of your media assignment group

Assignment:

Before this classroom session, you will have read the submitted abstracts, and submitted at least one question or comment per abstract, of the students whom you conducted the media assignment with.

This should be a constructive question/comment with the intent of helping your course mate. Focus on what you find interesting in your course mates' ideas and then try to push them in a direction that will improve the ideas even more. Some questions/comments will inevitably be repeated by several students, but this is not a problem. On the contrary, this usually means that there is really something for the author to think a bit extra about.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on October 16.

Required length of text: One question/comment per abstract.

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

Week Nine (November 7)**Title:**

Consultation about Research Papers + Group activity

Location:

1. Room A975a
2. Hallwyl Museum, Hamngatan 4, Stockholm
<https://hallwylskamuseet.se/en/>

Time:

15:00 – 16:30 at SSE, the tour starts at 17:00

Themes:

- Consultation with teacher and discussion with course mates about the progress of the Research paper
- A guided tour at the Hallwyl Museum

Readings:

No readings

Assignment:

No assignment

Week Ten (November 14)**Title:**

Oral presentations and questions

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

15:00 – 18:00 (or as long as we need)

Themes:

- 10-minutes presentations of papers, with ~5 minutes for questions

Readings:

No readings

Assignment:

1. Before this classroom session, you will have submitted the first draft of your Research Paper.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on November 13.

Required length of text: 1000-3000 words, INCLUDING REFERENCES (please respect this word range).

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

2. You will also prepare a short presentation of the paper. It can be a PowerPoint presentation, but this is not a requirement. Focus on why you chose the topic you chose, what you did and what your conclusions are.

Week Eleven (November 21)**Title:**

The History of the Swedish Restaurant Business

Location:

1. Room A975a
2. Tennstopet, Dalagatan 50
<https://www.tennstopet.se/en/>

Time:

15:00 – 18:00 (or as long as we need)

Themes:

- Guest lecture by Richard Tellström, a researcher in food culture in the past and present and a PhD in Ethnology
- Dinner at Tennstopet

Readings:

- The paper of one of your course mates

Assignment:

Before this classroom session, you will have submitted and e-mailed your course mate a peer-review document about the paper you have read in which you (1) briefly summarize what the paper is about, (2) provide constructive criticism, and (3) suggest changes for the final version.

Deadline for submission is 12:00 on November 20.

Required length of text: 400-500 words (please respect this word range)

Required format: No requirement, but be consistent

Week Twelve (November 28)**Title:**

Paper “defense”

Location:

Room A975a

Time:

9.00 – 12:00

Themes:

- Course evaluations
- Paper “defenses”

Readings:

No reading

Assignment:

1. Before this session, you will have submitted the final version of your Research Paper.

Deadline for submission is 23:59 on November 27.

Required formatting: Times New Roman 12, 1.5 spaces

Required length of text: 2000-3000 words (please respect this word range)

2. Before this session, you have also prepared yourself for a brief oral presentation of the paper you have reviewed, as well as three or four questions to its author. You are also expected to demonstrate an interest in fellow course mates whose papers you have not read.