

WGSS S263E **Rye: Cultural History and Embodied Practice**

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Meets T/Th 1-2:15 ET
June 30-August 1, 2025

Based in methodology from gender and sexuality studies, we use the grain rye as a focal point to offer a highly interdisciplinary exploration of the biology, changing cultural importance, culinary practice and mythology around “rye.” Part of a collaboration between Yale and the Bread Lab at WSU, this class will include an examination of when, how and where desire for rye food products flourished and waned, how different knowledges co-exist about “rye” including the embodied practices of women who bake with rye as well as the knowledge that rye itself might contain.

Each week of class consists of two 75 minute discussions, approximately 70 pages of reading, and 3 hours of pre-recorded material, some of which will be virtual field trips and some of which will ask you to engage in embodied practice (often baking) which may take another few hours.

This course will also offer WR credit. Fours week will require a 4 page paper using a technique of historical or ethnographic writing. We will discuss these approaches in class and offer one-on-one paper consultations. In addition, for each weekly embodied practice, you will write a one page sensory ethnography on your experience.

July 1 Class 1: Reconceptualizing plants and grasses

Much recent scholarship invites us to rethink how we tell stories about plants, and particularly about how to de-center humans in our histories of plants. Today, we will consider some of these new historiographical approaches.

Video Introduction: Who we are and why we are teaching this: Prerecorded

Readings:

Michael Pollan [The Botany of Desire](#) Introduction

Robin Wall Kimmerer, [Braiding Sweetgrass](#), “Mishkos Kenomagwen: The teachings of grass”

Francesca Bray, “Underground Inspirations: Tuber Sciences and Their Histories,” [Isis](#) 112, no. 3 (September 1, 2021): 548–63

July 3 Class 2: Introduction to Sensory Ethnography

We invite you to engage all of your senses in your encounters with rye. Today, we read some theory and a sensuous example of rye writing, and then encounter rye in real time and take a moment to use all of our senses in the encounter.

Virtual Field Trip: Watching Yale Farm rye grow: Prerecorded

Embodied Practice: Exploration with rye grains and rye head

Readings:

Sarah Pink, Sensory Ethnography (2009), Ch 3 “Preparing for sensory research: practical and orientation issues” pp 51-70

Stanley Ginsburg The Rye Baker (2016) pp 8-23.

SE1 due July 4

Paper 1 due July 6

July 8 Class 3: Cultures of Rye

Today, we will explore how practices with rye became part of cultural identities in the ancient world and in early modern northern and eastern Europe. We will also consider how bread and beer have become central to many societies.

Embodied Practice: Baking an Estonian rye bread: Prerecorded

Virtual Field Trip: Atticus Bakery: Prerecorded

Virtual Field Trip: Stewards of the Land brewery and Rye IPA: Prerecorded

Readings:

Catherine Zabinski, Amber Waves: The Extraordinary Biography of Wheat from Wild Grass to World Mega-Crop (2020), Ch. 2 “The First Encounter” pp 23-43

Arranz-Otтеgui, et al, “Archeobotanical evidence reveals the origins of bread 14,400 years ago in northeastern Jordan,” PNAS July 31 2018, pp 7925-7930.

Randi Haaland, “Porridge and Pot, Bread and Oven: Food Ways and Symbolism in Africa and the Near East from the Neolithic to the Present,” Cambridge Archeological Journal 17:2(2007), 167-83.

July 10 Class 4 Rye and the Origins of Western States

Whether farmers grow rye and whether people eat rye bread and drink rye beer can depend on the organization of the state.

Readings: Paolo Squatriti's “Rye’s Rise and Rome’s Fall” in Late Antique Archaeology 12(1): 160-169 (October 2016)

Jim Scott Against the Grain Ch. 4

Gilgamesh, trans. Stephen Mitchell, Pp. 76-87

SE2 due July 11

Paper 2 due July 13

July 15 Class 5: Rye and the Modern State

We will explore how two different twentieth century states shape grain’s agricultural and consumption patterns.

Darra Goldstein, The Kingdom of Rye, (2022), Chapter 1 and Coda
Tae-Ho Kim, “The Good, the Bad, and the Foreign: Trajectories of Three grains in modern South Korea.”

July 17 Class 6 Rye in Nineteenth C. New England

In which we transport ourselves back to the hey-day of rye in New England with lots of primary sources and re-creations.

Virtual Field Trip: Rye distilling at Litchfield Distillery: Prerecorded

Virtual Field Trip: Skagit Valley Malting: Prerecorded

Embodied Practice: Making Porridge: Prerecorded

Embodied Practice: Laura, Jeremy and Maria re-enact 1800 dinner with rye whiskey:

Darwin P. Kelsey (1980) Early New England Farm crops

http://resources.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=779

Diary of Horace Clark, 1836-67, farmer in Granby, CT

http://resources.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=1160

Examination of three 19th c. American cookbooks at <https://d.lib.msu.edu/fa>

“Introduction” to Samuel M’Harry, *The Practical Distiller* (1809)

Cara Giaimo, “Diving to Drink a 19th c. Shipwreck’s Treasure” *NYTimes* 11/1/24

Daniel Walton, “Rye Not Here?” <https://ambrook.com/research/supply-chain/rye-not-here-kentucky-bourbon>

SE3 due July 18

Paper 3 due July 20

July 22 Class 7: Nutrition, Flavor and Contemporary Bakers

Interviews with contemporary bakers who are passionate about rye will be our ethnographic primary sources.

Embodied Practice: Rye cookies: Prerecorded

Interviews with bakers who use rye: Prerecorded

Readings:

“Rye and Health” review in *Trends in Food Science and Technology* (2018)

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2018.06.018>

Kaisa Poutanen, “What is so good about Rye? A Finnish and Nordic Perspective” (2021)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=->

[MWjPA5UcDs&list=PLBAGLj4R2H5shuPidiLV82htDSOONAgvB&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MWjPA5UcDs&list=PLBAGLj4R2H5shuPidiLV82htDSOONAgvB&index=5)

July 24 Class 8: Rye, Soil Health and Climate Change

What challenges and opportunities face contemporary farmers as they decide how much of their fields to devote to growing rye?

Interview panel with rye farmers: Prerecorded

Virtual Field Trip to Chimacum Valley Grainery: Prerecorded

“Cover Crops, a Farming Revolution with deep Roots in the Past,” [NYTimes](#) 2/7/2016

Gabriel Popkin, “Can ‘Carbon Smart’ Farming play a Key Role in the Climate Fight?” *Yale Environment* 360, March 31, 2020.

SE4 due July 25

Paper 4 due July 27

July 30 Class 9: Ergot, Rye and the Salem Witch Trial

We will use a trial format to consider the challenges of evidence and historical causality in assessing rye’s role in witchcraft.

Embodied Practice: Three-Grain bread

Reading: MK Matossian, “Ergot and the Salem Witchcraft Affair,” *American Scientist* (1982)

Emerson Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, (2015) Ch. 4 “The Afflicted”

“Pride and Prejudice: The Story of Ergot” J. W. Bennett, Ronald Bentley [Perspectives in Biology and Medicine](#), Volume 42, Number 3, Spring 1999, pp. 333-355

August 1 Class 10: Concluding Discussion

This class will be an opportunity to reflect on the development of your r(y)elationship and how you fared maintaining the intellectual and personal commitments you wrote about in your first paper.

Reading: “Queering Rye” by Maria, Jeremy and Laura

SE 5 due July 31