A TASTE OF RUSSIA
(Food in Russian History and Culture)
28068(RUSS 293-03)
Dr. Natalya Makarova-Thaman
Thursday 12:30 -1:15
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No knowledge of Russian is required
Course Description:
This course is designed to introduce students to Russian cultural history with particular focus on Russian customs, traditions and attitudes toward food and eating. By weaving together Russian cuisine, literature, visual art, holidays, rituals and folk traditions, students will develop a better understanding and appreciation of Russian cultural identity and lifestyle.

The course includes an overview of Russian culinary history and the traditional way of life of Russian people, reference to the selected works of the famous Russian writers (Lev Tolstoy, Nickolay Gogol, Anton Chekhov), as well as food related essays of foreign authors, who have been exposed to the Russian way of life, then and now.

“The house is beautiful not because of its walls, but because of its pirogi”
(Не красна изба углами, а красна пирогами)
Course Format:

- Lectures with Power Point Presentations
- Group Discussions of Readings
- Oral presentation or “Experts’ Comments” (two assignments)
- Final Project (PPP)
- 2 Cooking Sessions
- Events:
  - “Maslenitsa” (Russian Mardi Gras)
  - “Pir na Ves’ Mir” (Feast for the Whole World) lunch for faculty and students.

Course Requirements and Grading:

- Class attendance and participation - 35%
- Vocabulary log (at least 20 entries) - 10%
- Oral presentations or “Experts’ Comments” - 10% each – total 20%
- Final Project (Presentation or PPP) - 15%
- Cooking sessions - 10% each – total 20%

Required Reading: Weekly readings will either be distributed in class or available on reserve on-line (password – tasteru) and at the Pius XII Library.
Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1: Overview and Introduction to the Course.
Week 2: Historical Overview (The Food Time Line)
Week 3 & 4: Russian Traditional Culture (Eatable, Wearable and Livable Art)
Week 5: Traditional Rituals (Circle of life: special food for special events)
Week 6: Russian Holidays (calendar of festive events and its traditional food)
Week 7: **Maslenitsa: Butter Week**  (Russian Mardi Gras event. Faculty and students are invited)
**Week 8:** What do Russians Drink?

**Week 9:** At the Tsar’s Table and Entertaining Russian Style

**Week 10 & 11:** Food in Russian Literature: (Food featured as a symbol in 19th century literature *(Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gogol)*)

**Week 12:** Food in Russian and Soviet Visual Art (Concepts and ideas behind the images of food through the history of Russian art).
Week 13 & 14 : Today’s Russia (guest speaker & presentations by students)

Cooking session II (TBA)

Week 15 -“Pir na Ves’ Mir”- Feast for the faculty and guests (TBA)

Students’ presentations:

*What we have cooked and what we have learned.*
Extract from PPP “Traditional culture”

Bread and Salt custom

Хлеб да соль

“Khleb da Sol”
Bread and Salt Custom

- Originated in western Russia as a sign of hospitality
- Today: weddings and official ceremonies

‘Khlebosol'stvo”
“hospitality” and “open-handedness” consists of the roots
‘khleb' (bread) and ‘sol' (salt)

Significance:
**Bread** – wealth and prosperity
**Salt** – respect, care and protection

Magic power of bread and salt (*Domostroi*)
Bread

• Breaking bread, earn our bread, bread and butter, bread winner, the greatest thing since sliced bread (expression in English)
• Company (Latin: com + panis)
• “Staff of life”
• Bread is the head of everything (Russian proverb)
• A table with bread is an altar; without it, a plank (Russian proverb).
• First on the table (Without bread there is no breakfast, no dinner, no supper). Peasant daily could eat around 1 kg (2 pounds) of black rye bread.
• Before the revolution Russia was a breadbasket of Europe
Symbolic value of bread:

– Signifies wealth and health
– The cycle (from seed to plant to product) mirrored creation, both human and cosmic
– Associated values - fertility, abundance and prosperity
– Superstitions and attitudes toward bread

“When we die, all the bread we have wasted will be weighed, if it turns out to be more than the weight of our body, we will go to Hell.”