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UC courses ponder food's culture, future

Higher education Artistic workshop explores food - class ponders farming's future

Sarah Henry Updated 12:39 pm, Monday, August 27, 2012



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Amara Tabor-Smith (right) and Lisa Wymore will lead a UC Berkeley workshop that uses storytelling, singing and movement to explore food's place in society.

The study of food - agriculture, economics, culture, history and nutrition - has long had a home in higher **education**. But now comes new college curriculum that offers food for thought for students seeking an edible education.

Case in point: Two courses that explore challenges within our food systems - including one with an artistic edge - are being served up this fall at UC Berkeley.

From the Field to the Table, a five-week workshop in the theater, dance and performance studies department, will include students and community members working to fight poverty and promote food justice and policy. The workshop closes with performances at Zellerbach Playhouse in October.

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"This is not all about 'Let's eat organic and dance around the maypole,' " said **Lisa Wymore**, who will co-lead the course with fellow faculty member **Amara Tabor-Smith** and **Paloma McGregor** of New York's Urban Bush Women, a contemporary dance company that explores the African diaspora.

"Our food systems are in peril: We just had the hottest summer ever, the corn crops are gone, food prices are skyrocketing, and people are concerned about pesticides and GMOs," or genetically modified organisms, Tabor-Smith said.

The workshop will include field trips to urban farms, food parties and guest speakers from food security organizations such as People's Grocery in Oakland. How the workshop of 30 to 35 unfolds will depend on the participants, but it will use storytelling, singing and movement to explore rituals, culture and memories about food.

Translation into art

Wymore imagines an urban gardener describing a relationship to the land and connecting with an African American dancer and finding common ground, perhaps translating a shared food experience into a rhythmic piece.

"People have knowledge in their bodies and voices and may best express themselves through movement and vocalization instead of a research paper," she said.

Or participants might examine how food traditions are impacted by industrialized agriculture, fast-food culture and the global food crisis. How do you, as Tabor-Smith has explored, re-create your mother's gumbo when fish stocks are threatened? Individual food memoirs, written during the course of the workshop, may wind up as vignettes in the final piece.

Sharing stories

Tabor-Smith, a modern dancer and choreographer who founded **Deep Waters Dance Theater**, has explored food before in a performance "Our Daily Bread," which is slated to return to **CounterPulse theater** in San Francisco in November.

"Eating with people breaks down barriers like nothing else," Tabor-Smith said. "It's an intimate act, and it's a necessity.

"There's something about when you bring people to the table. ... Food is a key that opens a door for people to share their stories."

Michael Pollan course

One of the suggested readings for Tabor-Smith's class includes "In Defense of Food" by Michael Pollan, a professor at UC Berkeley's **Graduate School of Journalism**, who will run his own food course on campus beginning Tuesday.

The best-selling author heads up Edible Education 103: Telling Stories About Food and Agriculture. The course, in its second year, is open to undergraduate and graduate students; 300 free seats are also available to the public.

The course, which runs weekly through Dec. 4, will dig into the national debate about the future of farming and food and explore how the U.S. food system affects the environment, public health, farms and food service workers, and the culture at large.

Bay Area personalities

Funded by the Edible Schoolyard Project of UC alumna **Alice Waters**, the class features such Bay Area food personalities as Waters, Pizzaiolo/**Boot and Shoe Service** restaurateur **Charlie Hallowell**, and food science author **Harold McGee**, along

with Virginia third- generation alternative farmer and author **Joel Salatin**.

Public registration starts at 10 a.m. on the Wednesday preceding the next Tuesday's lecture. For information, go to edibleschoolyard.org/news-events/events.

From the Field to the Table

Performance workshop: Open to the public, starting with an informational meeting. Facilitators Lisa Wymore and Amara Tabor-Smith will discuss the scope of the project, what to expect, and how to get involved. 6-8 p.m. Wednesday, Bancroft Dance Studio, 2401 Bancroft St., Berkeley, fromthefieldtothetable.blogspot.com.

Performances: The workshop culminates with performances. Oct. 12-14, Zellerbach Playhouse. (510) 642-8827. tips.berkeley.edu.

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