

Culinary Arts:
Class Overview
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Throughout the quarter I took a variety of different classes, this document outlines briefly what each class taught me and how it helped to build up my skills throughout the year towards the A La Carte class and eventually Practicum and heading out into the real world.

There was definitely a lot to learn about cooking and about working together as a team in the kitchen to achieve the desired results.

Concepts and Theories of Culinary Techniques

This course began my journey by building knowledge of the different ingredients and techniques that are used during the kitchen classes. Along with the excellent suggested reading material it built an important foundation to begin the course with.

The course taught me the proper definition of certain kitchen terms; the difference between simmering, poaching and boiling and the proper terms and proportions for the different cut sizes: brunoise, julienne, dice, slice, mince. This was then expanded upon in the practical work in the kitchen.

There was an introduction to a wide range of ingredients, their similarities and differences and the proper cooking techniques as well as what to look for to ensure good quality and freshness.

Sanitation and Safety

This was a vital course, not only did it set me up for getting my food safe certification so that I was legally allowed to handle and sell food for others to consume. It also helped to teach me the fundamentals of how to cook and prepare food properly.

Knowing the correct doneness to eradicate bacteria but ensure that the food is still cooking rare/medium rare and safe to consume. As well as basic fundamentals such as correct handwashing technique and basic hygiene.

Dimensions of Culinary

For me dimensions of culinary was the first introduction into what it's like to work in the culinary industry. This course is filled with exciting stories and interviews from previous students and experienced chefs. Some of the knowledge and ways that this course influences where I saw yourself going in the future was invaluable to my future in culinary.

This course also gave me a chance to update and work on my CV for the future and to do a few practice interviews. It was one of the most fun courses and one of the most useful.

The homework was a study of a book which contains a vast amount of different stories from many famous chefs from around the world, some of their experiences are knowledge was incredibly useful.

Some of the potential for making good contacts including future job opportunities was very encouraging in this class, even if many of us felt too inexperienced to jump at a job offer at this point.

Nutrition

Nutrition was an interesting online class which covered the basics of micro and macro nutrition. It's important to understand what we are feeding our customers and how important nutrition is in so many culinary fields: Especially large catering operations such as in hospitals or in the army.

A lot of this course focused on being more aware of what we are eating around us; to focus on the ingredient list and branding of products and not fall for greenwashing and fake health benefits which are very prevalent now. And to be more informed in general.

Management By Menu

This course was a crash course in restaurant management, it built my knowledge of how the menu affects all aspects of the restaurant and how to craft and build a menu which is reasonably priced and could work in real life.

I spent a lot of time on my final project which was a concept design for a complete restaurant along with a floor plan, pricing and equipment. I'm quite proud of this project and have linked it alongside my portfolio for further viewing.

Food & Beverage operations management

This course was a lot of fun; it is necessary to complete in order to receive the serving it right certification. It taught me a lot about wine production and the different flavours and complexities which they possess.

It incorporated a small amount of wine tasting with a vast amount of knowledge about their different identities, acidities, flavours, tannins and more. As well as discussing the recommended pairings.

There was also some talk of proper pricing and serving techniques, as well as a fun class which involved polishing glasses and silverware properly and learning how to fold napkins for service.

Sustainable Purchasing & Controlling costs

This class was very math focused which I enjoyed greatly. This was very much a business class with a focus on how to properly source local, fresh ingredients at a reasonable price, reducing waste and reducing carbon footprint.

As the course progressed we learnt about purchasing and pricing, how to take into account all of the different costs in the kitchen and incorporate them into pricing our recipe. A kitchen can have incredibly high operating and food cost with very tight profit margins, so it's important to know how to do the math and to do it right.

Our final project was to create a recipe and source local ingredients; get the information of the suppliers and cost the recipe. This is linked with my portfolio.

Fundamentals of Classical techniques

The first kitchen class that I took; although I've done plenty of cooking at home this class really stripped me back to fundamentals and builds you up again. You take the knowledge from the fundamental concepts class and apply them each week in the kitchen.

This class starts at the basics, stocks and soups and vegetables; you don't touch any meat until about week six! However while doing the other basics there was plenty of time to focus and work on other kitchen skills which I was not experienced in. Simple things such as cleaning the floors and the dishes properly, maintaining a sanitary workspace and learning how to work with others in a kitchen environment.

This was also the first class where we had to begin writing recipes weekly for the class and coming prepared with prep lists, timelines, sanitation checklists and plating diagrams. Many of us failed to bring these in the first few weeks and wouldn't learn until later to build these into our schedules to make our work in the kitchen much more organised.

Looking back I think this was one of the hardest courses. It was hard for a lot of us to take criticisms on our food, some of us for the first time. To prepare food, focus on sanitation, do the extra curricular work and still operate as a team. It definitely was like being thrust into the deep end but it helped a lot of us step up and see the areas we needed to improve upon.

North American Regional Cuisine

During the second quarter we began learning about North American regional cuisine the course was a very interesting building block on what we learned in fundamentals. We began to work as a team together a little bit more; making several elements of a plate and combining them with other team members. This was also the first time we were creating full menus which has to be plated and garnished properly and served hot and on time.

There was a little bit of a foray into making desserts and pastries in this class too. Although the focus was definitely on trying to present food hot and on time, the emphasis in this class definitely became timelines and recipes. Many of us began to come properly prepared to the classes with all of our materials with us.

We were also encouraged in this class to think a little about food and the history of food; how the local differences, soil and seasons affect the regional food and how the affects our eating habits today.

World Cuisine

World cuisine class was our chance to take the experience from fundamentals and expand it; using the same basic cooking techniques and learning how the different spices and cooking history from around the world have created an amazing plethora of different cuisines and dishes.

We served food family style in this class and were encouraged to sit down at the end of the class and eat a meal together; tasting the different dishes, expanding our food knowledge and just enjoying cooking and eating together. It was a good class which gave a lot of us a good chance to enjoy cooking together in an environment which was more like a family cooking dinner together.

This class also had a high emphasis on presentation and sanitation, it was the second quarter and we were expected to improve. Sanitation buckets became common, and we began to properly handle the food to avoid sanitation mistakes.

Intro to Baking

All Culinary students take intro to baking and intro to pastry; baking was definitely an interesting class. I know I gained about 10 lb's taking home muffins, cookies and 24 buns every week.

Baking is a very fine science and a crash course in it was very important. I made soft rolls about 5 times and even though the recipe was the same I got 5 different out comes each time...Too much kneading, too little proofing, too MUCH proofing, not a good enough egg wash etc etc. Every little change makes a difference in the final product and a good baker will have uniform final products.

Baking was a great course in how to do multiple things at once; a lot of the prep for baking doesn't take that long so it's possible to complete 4-5 large batch items in one morning; however to do this it's important to be very good at time management and to get up early enough.

Intro to Pastry

Intro to pastry was an amazing fun class, another class where it's easy to gain a lot of weight. Even though I don't particularly have a passion for decorating cakes, there are many other elements of pastry (and items) which I enjoy very much.

This class was actually really great at breaking down my perceptions of what I thought was difficult and what I thought I was capable of doing. As well as teaching me how to deal with my mistakes and fix them or adjust to them as quickly as possible. This class shared a lot in common with intro to baking while being a little more detailed and technical.

The class took place very early in the morning so it was a great feeling to go in like a baker at 6:30 and then come out at 11:00 with a bag full of freshly made croissants and breakfast muffins.

The recommended reading material for this class was very good; a lot of additional knowledge which built on the fundamentals class. Further detailing certain chemical processes and how they affect the final product.

Classical French Cuisine

This was a very unique class, our teacher trained in France and worked in Switzerland for a few years. This gave us a chance to experience some classic French training. We began to work together as a team working on one completed menu; sharing prep and communicating to have the items out on time. We were coming prepared and began to feel more like a unit.

Much of the food in this class was prepared A La Minute (to order.) And some of the finishing techniques which were shown to us were incredibly inspiring, creating the best, tastiest pan sauces in 30 seconds. Beautiful garnishes and proper French plating techniques and recipes.

There is definitely something to be said about a classical French culinary education. We even go to experiment with some of the more unique ingredients: Frog's Legs and Sweetbreads. This class was the perfect practice for the following A La Carte class where teamwork and organisation would be vital.

A La Carte Kitchen

A La Carte is the final kitchen class; it incorporates everything from the previous classes to produce food which is sold in the bistro to local clientele for a reasonable price.

This class is very engaging, it required me to really up my game so that all the different areas which I had been practicing: Sanitation, cooking techniques, organization, teamwork. Could all come together so that people were experiencing good food served hot.

This was my first experience on any kind of line and there was definitely a large amount to learn, especially about how to work together as a team so that the food goes out at the same time and everyone maintains a safe work environment, to be able to remain calm even when everything seems to be going bad and be able to lean on other people when you need help.

It was very satisfying to finally be preparing and serving food which people were paying for. I definitely had my main focus on sanitation but I also really wanted to present food which people thought tasted good and was beautiful.

This class is also where we take the ITA to get our Red Seal qualification, we bring everything together from the entire year and take the test under supervision from our instructors.

Practicum

Practicum is a chance to get out into the field of work and get some experience operating in the culinary industry in some capacity.

I was lucky and got many opportunities while I was studying; in the end I chose to work at Pete's Meat's Deli & Butchery. I had been interested in butchery from the start and wanted to increase my knowledge in this area; it is invaluable knowledge for a chef to have to reduce costs and to know how to properly cook each cut from each animal.

Most of my experience was in the Deli, making stocks, soups, sauces and salads. Preparing sandwiches for the customers and slicing and selling deli meat. I got the chance to ask a lot of questions about the meat and the preparation and to observe a lot of the butchery. I got a job offer around week 7 and look forward to going back after I finish at school so I can further improve my knowledge.