

Undergraduate Seminar
Coffee, Sugar and Other Addictive Foods
Professor Gail Triner

This seminar will explore the social and cultural histories of sugar, coffee and other addictive substances, such as tobacco, chocolate, tea, heroin, cocaine The introduction of these substances has had manifold and fascinating implications for human endeavor. They have affected lifestyles and social relations, labor (slavery, other coercive labor systems, and others), imperial and colonial systems of government, criminality, personal behavior and technology – among other considerations in how people have organized themselves. These issues have arisen throughout the world and in all time periods. We will begin with an introduction to identify some of the historical issues that addictive substances have in common, using sugar as an example. Then, each seminar participant will research the history of an addictive substance or a specific aspect of its importance, covering a time period that does not extend beyond 1950. Research will use original historical documents, which can range from pre-modern documents to newspaper advertisements. Participants will write a paper of approximately 25 pages to communicate their findings. This paper may be either a research paper or, at your option, a work of historical fiction or other creative writing. (Depending on the nature of a creative writing project, the page requirement may vary.)

The Undergraduate History Seminar is the first (and perhaps only) opportunity for history majors to engage in the practice of what historians do. As such, it is a course that requires a serious commitment from its participants. The requirements for the course reflect that, with a fairly heavy workload. However, I also assume that you have not had a class of this nature before. I hope and expect to guide students on a close individual basis.