

Department: Department of Modern and Classical Languages

Course No: 3251 [251]

Credits: 3

Title: Cultures of the German-Speaking Countries

Contact: Roger Travis

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 International

Catalog Copy: GERM 251: Cultures of the German-speaking Countries

Either semester. Three credits. Conducted in English. May not be used to satisfy the undergraduate foreign language requirement. An interdisciplinary course on the German-speaking countries, analyzing cultural life and past and present development. Period or thematic emphasis may vary. Discussion of selected non-fictional and fictional readings, films, slides and recordings.

Course Information: This is a multifaceted course that approaches the past and present cultures of the German-speaking countries from a variety of angles, such as gender, class, race, minority and majority cultures. German-speaking cultures can predominantly be found in Germany and Austria and as one of several dominant cultures in Switzerland, Luxemburg, Liechtenstein, and Namibia (Africa). Minority cultures in the German-speaking countries today are, most importantly, from Turkey, but also from Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and other countries. Course discussions cover a wide variety of human experience and cultural developments, expressions and representations in historical contexts ranging from approx. 1500 to the present.

- The course is designed to introduce students to a very rich interdisciplinary "potpourri" of the cultural life and development in the German-speaking countries. Guest speakers from a variety of disciplines such as Music, Geography, Philosophy, Political Science provide expert input. Students learn how culture with little "c" (e.g., housing, eating, behavioral habits and more) as well as culture with capital "C" such as productions in literature, music, visual arts, architecture, philosophy, and film relate to cultural, political, and socio-economic developments in a particular historical and geographic context.

- Students become familiar with the histories and cultural diversity of the German-speaking countries and learn to critically analyze active and passive cultural participation by people representing various classes, races, genders, and ethnic backgrounds.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: This course on cultural life and development in the German-speaking countries supports students in developing their ability to critically analyze and evaluate cultural development within a particular historical context, and form and articulate their own opinions and judgement.

- This course's "foreign" topics expand students' knowledge about the world and, more importantly,

inspire them to draw comparisons to developments in their own lives, times, and countries, and their religious, gender, cultural, and ethnic affiliations.

Course topics that stimulate such comparisons include, for example, the question to which extent gender, race, and class play a role in cultural production and reception and how German-speaking cultural life has been impacted: by power relations in a variety of political systems ranging from absolutism to fascism, communism, and democracy; by religious developments such as Martin Luther's departure from Roman Catholic Christianity; by minorities such as Jews, Afro-Germans, Turks and Turkish-Germans, and other migrants; by colonialism, revolutions, wars including WWI and II; and by political, social and economic upheaval in various historical periods.

- Learning about cultural developments, past and present, in the German-speaking countries, students become aware of their own era, society and cultural make-up and conscious of the diversity of human culture and experience. Learning about the culture of the German-speaking countries, students become familiar with, interested in, and curious about "the other," that means about the cultural habits and expressions of other majority and minority cultures inside and outside of the United States of America.

- Students learn to apply historical, social, political, economic and cultural, literary, artistic, philosophical considerations as tools to critically discuss and assess historical and cultural development. They learn to interpret history by analyzing cultural productions and to interpret cultural productions aided by their knowledge of history. They learn to become aware of their own culturally shaped perspective. Selected fictional and non-fictional texts, pieces of music and visual arts, and films expose students to a large variety of human topics which, in this case, reflect perspective of another culture. The course encourages students to remain lifelong learners in the sense that they continue to critically notice and analyze cultural development and productions within the historical context of their production and reception. They learn to be open-minded toward people, values, cultural products, and art forms of other cultures.

CA1 Criteria: This course about cultural life and development in the German-speaking countries from approx. 1500 to the present introduces students to a broad vision of humanist, historical, cultural, and artistic themes. Students learn to critically investigate and analyze human experience made and transformed into artistic and cultural expression in various historical contexts. The themes of this course include but are not limited to:

- the impact specific historical events and developments had on German culture (e.g. German Martin Luther's and Swiss Johann Calvin's Protestant writings; religious counter-Reformation as documented in German and Austrian Baroque architecture and music; the revolutionary quest for human equality as expressed in Ludwig van Beethoven's music; the experience of the industrial revolution as discussed by Karl Marx and others; the experience of colonialism, WWI, WWII, fascism and the Holocaust, communism and democracy in divided Germany during the Cold War, reunification of a divided country as documented in diaries, films, paintings, literature, etc.);

- cultural periods (e.g., the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Biedermeier, Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Art Nouveau, Expressionism, Art Deco, etc.) as reflected in philosophy, music, literature, and the visual arts;

- cultural expressions of healthy and unhealthy German patriotism and nationalism, from the Brothers Grimm's fairytales (1812-22) to the statue of Germania (1840s), Nazi propaganda (as in Leni-Riefenstahl's film "Triumph of the Will," 1934), cultural extremism by Neo-Nazis, and German integration into the European Union.

- minority cultures in the German-speaking countries (e.g. Jewish women's life as depicted in Henriette Herz's nineteenth-century memoirs; Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis as part of Jewish culture in Vienna around 1900; Jewish discrimination and persecution during the Holocaust as documented by painter and Auschwitz-victim Charlotte Salomon and playwright Bertolt Brecht; Germans as colonial power in Namibia/Africa as discussed in Uwe Timm's novel Morenga; Turkish life in contemporary Germany as a topic in the writings of Turkish-German author Emine Oezdamar; and Afro-German cultural predicaments as displayed in the poems of Afro-German and lesbian writer May Ayim);

- representative human experience (e.g.; the experience of war, violence, and hunger in Kaethe Kollwitz's sculptures; insights into the Self as suggested by Sigmund Freud; living in a socialist society as described by East-German writers Christa Wolf and Ulrich Plenzdorff; belonging to a minority culture [see above]),

- issues of gender and sexual orientation (e.g., the beginnings of the nineteenth-century German women's movement to women's literature since the 1970s),

- and more.

In this course students acquire the tools for and practice in cultural analysis of both content and form. Through readings, lectures, and discussions, they learn about political, economic, and social developments and cultural production as a process of exchange and negotiation within a given historical framework. By practicing guided but increasingly more independent analysis of cultural artifacts and expressions (including investigating questions of content, aesthetics, and cultural-historical context), students develop the ability to understand the workings of artistic, cultural and historical processes. While the content of cultural expressions inspire discussions of human experience within a particular personal, social, cultural, and/or historical context, the formal analysis allows students to understand the transition of a human experience, visions, or ideals into cultural expression. This course thus helps students develop the skill of critically "reading" history as cultural text and culture as historical text; students become conscious of the relationship between society and aesthetic production and reception; they learn to decode and interpret cultural and artistic modes of symbolic representation as carriers of meaning that can be relevant to recipients in another time and place to themselves.

CA4 Criteria: Issues of both diversity and multiculturalism play a central role in this course. Through many examples, students learn how social, political and economic development interacts with cultural life, in this case in the German-speaking countries. The course dedicates much of its syllabus to topics that involve power relations between majority and minority cultures, e.g.;

- the religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics following Martin Luther's departure from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th and 17th centuries;

- German-Jewish culture within an historically sometimes welcoming, more often anti-Semitic and - during the Nazi era- explicitly violent and destructive German environment (the course focuses on the 18th through 21st centuries);

- the cultural impact of a white German elite colonizing Namibia, Africa, around 1900;

- discrimination of non-conformism in formerly socialist East Germany;

- minorities' quest for social, economic, and political equality: Turkish, Turkish-German, and other minority/migrants' cultures in contemporary Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (since the 1960s);

- racism and the difficult path to establishing an Afro-German culture (since the 1980s);

- issues of gender and sexual orientation;

- and more.

Students learn to reflect on issues involving human rights (e.g., the Holocaust), migration (e.g., migrants from Turkey, Vietnam, Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and other countries), race/racism (e.g. Afro-Germans). In this course, students are exposed to an unusually large variety of human experiences, perceptions, values, and modes of creativity expressed in different historical periods by people from a variety of national, religious, racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and genders.