

**Department:** Modern and Classical Languages

**Course No:** 3252 W

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** Studies in Early German Literature

**Contact:** Roger Travis

**Content Area:** CA1-Arts and Humanities

**WQ:** Writing

**Catalog Copy:** GERM 3252W. Studies in Early German Literature Either semester. Three credits. Conducted in German. Prerequisite or corequisite: GERM 233 or instructor consent. Study of a cohesive group of texts that mark the periods of the Middle Ages, Humanism, Reformation, and Baroque. Emphasis may vary. Attention will be given to the relevant socio-historical context and, when possible, to the visual and performing arts.

**Course Information:** This course is one of the sequence GERM 252, 253, 254, 255 (only one of which is offered each year, mostly 254 or 255) and introduces students to analyzing and interpreting various topics, genres, and forms in early German literature (13th through 17th centuries) and simultaneously familiarizes them with crucial periods and developments in German history and culture at the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity, such as Medieval courtly life, values and behavior, Minnesinging as expression of courtly love, urbanization, religious convictions and wars, developments in the sciences, ruptures in the feudal system, the beginning emancipation of the individual self, and more. When appropriate and possible, the course draws comparisons to similar occurrences and phenomena in other historical periods, countries, and/or cultures.

(b) COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Reading, writing, and researching assignments help students prepare for active participation in class discussions which are conducted in German. Students are provided with focus questions that guide their assignments. They are encouraged to form and express their own opinions in speaking and writing and substantiate their arguments on the basis of intellectually processed course readings, lectures, and class discussions.

- Selected literary readings (e.g., novellas, plays, poetry, letters, memoirs), occasionally some non-fictional texts, and information from the internet about historical events/developments, authors, and literary periods provide points of departure for class discussions.

- Students are introduced to the vocabulary and strategies of literary analysis, various literary genres and periods, and a number of theoretical approaches to literary criticism (e.g., New Historicism, Post-Colonialism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, etc.). Students learn to consider political, social, and economic developments, authors' biographies, aesthetic traditions, readers' perceptions as factors in literary analysis and interpretation. Comparisons to cultural developments and literary production in

the students' own time, countries, and national literatures are encouraged.

- Whenever appropriate, multimedia input (slides, film clips, musical pieces) enrich the discussions of the literary readings. Students research additional background information on specific works, authors, historical contexts, and literary scholarship.
- In-depth individual and/or group projects inspire students to research topics of their own interest and introduce them to their peers in class.
- Midterm and final examinations help assess students' performance.

(c) MAJOR THEMES, TOPICS, ISSUES:

- Definitions and functions of literature;
- literary genres;
- literary periods in early German literature;
- theoretical approaches to literary criticism;
- tools to analyzing literature;
- literary production and reception as a communicative process;
- relationship between text, author, socio-historical, political, economic context, and reader
- impacts of historical events and developments on German literature;
- religion, power struggles, and violence in German literature;
- class conflict in German literature;
- German literary works as a social and political voices;
- and more.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed:** This course supports students in developing their ability to critically analyze and evaluate works of literature as cultural productions within a particular historical context, and form and articulate their own opinions and judgement.

- Studying early German history, society, and culture through German literature of the Middle Ages through the Baroque, students learn about crises and continuity in human development and become aware of their own era, society and cultural make-up. They become conscious of the diversity of human culture and experience which, in this case, also reflect perspectives of another time and culture. Students become familiar with and interested in other cultures inside and outside of the United States of America.

- 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 to reflect on their own religious, class, and cultural affiliations. Course topics that stimulate such comparisons and reflections include, but are not limited to the question to which extent power struggles about religion and class privileges play a role in literary production and reception and how content and forms of German literature of the 13th through the 17th centuries has been shaped and impacted: by a strictly hierarchical and monarchical political system; by class conflicts between the nobility and the peasants; by the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church; by the crusades and wars between Moslems, Christians, and Jews; by the discrimination of Jewish minorities in Central Europe; and by the religious schism sparked off by Martin Luther and Johann Calvin and the resulting religious wars. These topics are inclined to reflect on and inspire moral and cultural sensitivity.

- Students learn to apply tools of literary analysis and discover how literature interacts with the time of its production, the time of its reception, and with the students themselves as readers.
- This course encourages students to remain lifelong learners in the sense that they continue to critically read literature against the backdrop of a given historical context on one hand and as thought provoking stimulation in their own lives on the other. Being confronted with the literature of another country and culture, they become aware of their own culturally shaped perspectives. They learn to be open-minded toward people, values, literary and cultural products of other cultures.

**CA1 Criteria:** This course about early German literature introduces students to a broad vision of humanist, historical, cultural, and literary themes. It fulfills the following criteria for Group I courses:

"1) Investigations and historical/critical analyses of human experience:" The literary readings of this course reflect on crucial periods and developments in German history and culture of the 13th through 17th centuries at the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity, such as Medieval courtly life, values and behavior, Minnesinging as expression of courtly love, urbanization, religious convictions and wars, developments in the sciences, ruptures in the feudal system, the beginning emancipation of the individual self, and more. The texts and topics provide the background for understanding some modern philosophies of the individual, political life, society, and religion. Students learn about crisis and continuity in human development and learn to critically investigate and analyze human experience as it has been transformed into literary expression. The themes of this course include but are not limited to:

- literary presentations of the self as it emancipates itself from the rigid structures of the feudal system (an overarching topic all through the course);
- criticism of the feudal order, as in works by Wernher dem Gdrtner and Walther von der Vogelweide (both in the 1200s), Thomas Muentzer (early 1500s);
- calling for equality of all humans before God, as in writings by Martin Luther (early 1500s);
- defending Protestantism and Martin Luther's Reformation, as in works by Hans Sachs (early 1500);
- warning against the arrogance of power, as in works by Christian Weise (1682);
- illuminating the roots of bourgeois urban culture, as in works by Joerg Wickram (1500s);
- From courtly service to the expression of individual love, as in the poetry of Walther von der Vogelweide (around 1200)
- commenting on the tragedy of the early modern scientist, as in "The History of Johann Faustus" (1587);
- the emancipation of German as a literary language, as in Opitz "Book on German Poetry" (1624)
- literary periods from the Middle Ages through Humanism to Baroque
- genres in early German literature;
- and more.

"3) Investigations into the modes of symbolic representation:" The course introduces students to the notion that literary language is another mode of symbolic representation and that this language is culturally specific and can be decoded and interpreted against a particular cultural and historical background. They learn to analyze, interpret, and evaluate literary works as carriers of meaning that can be relevant to readers of another time and another place.

"4) Comprehension and appreciation of written, graphic and/or performance art forms:" Students acquire the linguistic (in the German language) and intellectual tools necessary to comprehend, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate literary works. By practicing guided but increasingly more independent literary analysis (including investigating questions of content, form, and cultural-historical context), students develop the ability to understand the interrelations of literary production and historical (social, political, economic), cultural and psychological developments.

**W Criteria:** The writing component in this course has traditionally been very high although it was not a W-course. This course is part of the series GERM 252, 253, 254, 255 (all of which are proposed to add a W skill code). In these 200-level courses, German majors learn to analyze literary texts and practice to write several papers—of varying length (amounting to a total of 15 pages) and of varying degrees of difficulty—pertinent to the field of reading, analyzing, and interpreting German literature: content summaries, biographical pieces about specific authors, pieces of creative writing, literary analyses, book reviews, and advertisements for books. Depending on the purpose of the assignment, most papers will have to be written in German. The writing assignments further student's writing abilities in the area of literary investigations and scholarship and simultaneously help them improve their writing in German and deepen their knowledge about a particular author, literary text, or topic. The assignments are practical writing exercises appropriate for German majors and their need to prepare for writing within professional frameworks. Papers are returned to students with comments on content, organization, and style. Students are asked to revise their papers on the basis of these comments. For each paper, the first version accounts for 40% of the grade and the revised version for 60% of the grade. The grades for all papers amount to 50% of the total course grade. Students cannot pass this course without passing grades on all papers. The course's enrollment never exceeds 19 students.

**Supplemental Information:** This course GERM 252W is one of the series GERM 255W, 254W, 253W, and 252W. Per AY, only one of these courses is offered (most of the time, either GERM 255W or 254W).