

Department: MCL

Course No: GERM 1175

Title: Human Rights and German Culture

Credits: 3

Contact: Roger Travis

Content Area: CA1 and CA4 International

Catalog Copy: GERM 1175. Human Rights and German Culture Either semester. Three credits. Readings and lectures in English. May not be used to fulfill the undergraduate language requirement. Study of primary sources on and theories of human rights from the Age of Enlightenment until today as well as literature and other forms of art related to human rights. Students will discuss Germany 's colonial history, the Holocaust, human rights in divided Germany , and current debates on citizenship, multiculturalism , and political asylum.

Course Information:

a) Course description: The course will examine primary sources on and theories of human rights from the Age of Enlightenment until today as well as literature and other forms of art related to human rights. Literature and the arts have early evoked and discussed the idea of natural or universal basic rights. They frequently focused on human rights violations and ethical dilemmas. Literature, the visual , and the performing arts often emerged from or dealt with experiences of human rights violations and the traumas these violations have produced. Using various media, we will analyze documentary sources and works of art related to Germany 's colonial history, the Holocaust, human rights in divided Germany , and current debates on citizenship, multiculturalism, and political asylum. While this course introduces students to German human rights debates from the Age of Enlightenment to the present day and provides a case-oriented historical overview of related developments in German-speaking countries and central Europe, it also aims at raising the students' awareness of comparable issues in their own country, culture, and their own lives.

b) Course requirements: There will be two large exams, one midterm exam and the final exam. These exams will consist of mostly multiple choice questions and two brief essay questions. In addition, there will be some quizzes throughout the semester. Students will be encouraged to participate in class, and their participation will improve their grade. Particular emphasis will be on the case projects, which will allow students to use and review what they have learned in class. Students will be asked to work on visual, text-based, or multi-media group projects, dealing with one of the aspects covered in class. These projects will be developed on Vista and documented on a separate website, which I will design and implement for this course. The case method will challenge students to apply the research tools they have been introduced to (such as electronic databases provided by our library) and will allow for an assessment of the skills and knowledge students have acquired in class. A brief survey will be conducted

at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the course, allowing students to express their expectations, make suggestions, and give general or critical feedback.

c) Major themes, issues, topics: We will study well-proportioned excerpts of philosophical treatises on human rights from Kant to Arendt and Habermas and investigate literary productions, such as Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* (1804), Franz Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* (1919), the poetry of Nelly Sachs, Jurek Becker's *Bronstein's Children* (1986), or W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992). We will discuss documentary sources related to Germany's colonial past, the Holocaust, human rights (violations) in divided Germany, and the contemporary debate on multiculturalism and political asylum in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. We will listen to/watch personal accounts of Holocaust survivors and watch excerpts from "The Specialist," a documentary on the Eichmann trial in 1961. We will also look at paintings, sculptures, or photographs by artists like Käthe Kollwitz, John Heartfield, Gerhard Richter, et al. and discuss their relation to human rights discourses. While the weekly reading load will vary, it will never be excessive, considering that this is not the students' only class. From my perspective, it is their understanding of the subject matter, not the number of read pages that will determine the success of the class. The following questions will be central to our analysis: When and why have human rights been or have not been considered natural or universal? Can literature or the arts be considered ethical projects? How can we describe the impact on readers/observers who are confronted with representations of human rights violations? Which affective strategies might be involved in these representations? What are literature's, the arts', and philosophy's relations to politics?

How Meets Goals of Gen Ed.: This course fulfills the goals of general education by :

- 1) Helping students become articulate through communicative participation in working groups, project participation and presentations as well as through encouraging class discussion;
- 2) Acquiring intellectual breadth and versatility through introducing students to a wealth of topics reaching from philosophy, literature, and the arts to political theory and debates and showing their interconnectedness;
- 3) Acquiring critical judgment and moral sensitivity in introducing students to various approaches to ethics and human rights and confronting them with cases demanding decision-making in ethical dilemmas;
- 4) Broadening their horizons in familiarizing them with a different culture and its history, which in turn will:
 - a) widen their awareness of their own culture, era, and society;
 - b) increase their consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experiences (this applies especially to reading/watching personal accounts of Holocaust survivors and other life stories);
- 5) Introducing students to basic research tools which will enhance their information literacy and help them complete assignments and their case projects.

CA1 Criteria: This course focuses both on theories of human rights and experiences of the violation of these rights. It also discusses developments resulting from an increased awareness of human rights in the wake of crimes against humanity as well as the possibility to alert a society or humanity to human rights violations through artistic forms of expression . The course will also ask and discuss why such attempts sometimes fail . This includes analyses of the symbolic value of various artistic forms of expression (written, visual, performing arts) within various contexts. While this course introduces students to German human rights debates from the Age of Enlightenment to the present day and provides a case-oriented historical overview of related developments in German-speaking countries and central Europe , it also aims at raising the students' awareness to such and related issues in their own country, culture, and their own lives.

CA4 Criteria: While this course will introduce students to a culture that will be mostly unfamiliar to the majority of the students, they will (hopefully) begin to understand that, despite historical and cultural differences, many ethical dilemmas and social mechanisms are not particular to the German context only. In reading and watching documentary material and primary sources relating various persons' experiences and thoughts, students will learn to understand differences in perspectives. They will analyze and compare works of art (written, visual, performing) related to the theme of human rights and migration and thus be challenged to sharpen their understanding and articulation of these topics. This also applies to their work on the case projects. The historical dimension of the course will help the students understand the social, political, and economic dynamics that led to or had a major impact on developments in German history as well as German human rights debates (colonialism, war experiences and anti-war protests, the Holocaust, the German division, "guest workers," citizenship, migration, political asylum). As mentioned above, the course is designed not only to provide students with historical knowledge; it also aims at raising the students ' awareness to such and related issues in their own country, culture, and their own lives.

International: The course focuses on German culture and theories of human rights that are--despite claims of universality--linked to specific historical developments in German-speaking countries. Minorities and cultural diversity are central to most of these approaches and to this class. Examples are: The German-Jewish community in modern German history, migrants/guest workers in Germany , the Turkish-German community, political asylum issues. This class will discuss the development and transformation of the German society with respect to these groups.

Role of Grad Students: If a graduate student will be available to assist with this course, she/he will be supervised by the instructor. The assistant's work will include help in grading exams and quizzes, helping students during the preparation of their projects, and offering additional office hours for undergraduate students with questions on class content. The assistant will be expected to attend class sessions and will meet weekly with the instructor to discuss the progress of the class.

Supplementary Information: n/a