GER / SCAN 280M: THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN GERMANY AND SCANDINAVIA
University of Oregon – Fall 2020 – CRN 17884 / 17885

Instructor: Prof. Ian F. McNeely, Departments of History and German/Scandinavian
Canvas site: https://canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/168143
Meeting times: MW 2:15-3:45 at this Zoom link (or go to the Zoom sidebar on Canvas)
Email: imcneely@uoregon.edu
Office hours: make an appointment on this signup sheet, then meet me in my Zoom office

Description

German and Scandinavian Europe today boasts a higher quality of life, greater measurable happiness, more most-liveable cities, and higher metrics of human development, gender equality, economic competitiveness, and environmental sustainability than any other region in the world—including the United States. This course will ask whether Europeans in German-speaking and Scandinavian countries really live better than we do, and what we can learn from them.

Over ten weeks, we will look at how these societies, however imperfectly, have addressed challenges similar to the ones we face right now in the United States. We begin by contrasting the highly successful handling of the coronavirus pandemic in Germany and Denmark with Sweden’s more controversial response. We then ask what else, besides bodily health, we need in order to live well: a home, work, personal safety, and an education. Next—again taking our cues from current events—we move from struggles for gender equality and sexual freedom to protests for racial justice, environmental protection, and political democracy. Finally, we ask what responsibilities nations have for the crimes of their pasts and for the quality of life for future generations who will have to cope with climate change. We will adopt a case study approach, ranging widely from the 1940s through today’s news headlines.

This is a single, unified course: the GER and SCAN versions are identical. It counts for Arts & Letters Core Education credit. It also counts as either a GER or SCAN course for the purposes of the German, Scandinavian, and GerScan Studies degree programs. German literature majors may complete extra assignments in German (see me) or must count the course as English-only.

Expected learning outcomes

- Acquire broad knowledge of the cultures and societies of German-Scandinavian Europe
- Analyze the quality of life from multiple humanistic and social-scientific perspectives
- Interpret literary and other primary sources, as well as scholarly articles, with close attention to cultural-historical context, linguistic nuance, and argumentation

Where to find everything

The four required books (by Booth, Wolf, Erpenbeck, and Sjöwall & Wahlöö) can be ordered at the UO Duckstore or on Amazon. Use Canvas to find the other readings (at Files > Readings, or as a single ZIP file), prerecorded lectures (at Panopto Recordings), and class meetings and cloud recordings (at Zoom Meetings). This syllabus also has hyperlinks to much of what you need.
Class logistics

Because the pandemic has upended regular life, I have made the rhythm of work in this class as stable and predictable as I can. I will still try to keep things lively! Here’s the plan:

_Fridays by 12:00pm_ I will post a 30 min. _lecture_ to introduce the following week
The following week’s quiz goes live at this time too

_Mondays at 2:15pm_ Required* Zoom meeting: _quiz on readings due_, with discussion

_Tuesdays by 12:00pm_ I will post a 10 min. _lecture_ to bridge the week’s class meetings

_Wednesdays at 2:15pm_ Required* Zoom meeting: either _homework or in-class exercise_

So: each week, before participating in the required Zoom meetings, your job is to (1) watch the prerecorded lectures, (2) do the readings, (3) take the quiz by Monday 2:15pm, and (4) complete the homework, if any, by Wednesday 2:15pm. The quizzes and the homeworks presume you’ve already done the readings. The workload, including Zooms, averages 10-12 hours a week; plan on spending about 3 of these on the Wednesday homeworks the weeks when those are due.

**Zoom etiquette:** the whole Zoom experience is less dehumanizing if you can stand to keep your camera on. Please stay muted unless you’re talking. Don’t forget to unmute when you do speak up, or feel free to use the chat feature. You can raise your hand either physically or digitally, whichever is easier. We will often be using breakout rooms for work in 3-5 person groups.

*Zoom meetings will be recorded and posted (see the “Cloud recordings” tab) for those unable to attend. I will try to keep them under an hour, and make the last half hour _optional_ for those with questions or who want to chat. You can also schedule 1-on-1 office hours on my _signup sheet_.

**Grading**

40% 9 online Canvas quizzes, one due each Mon. (except Sep. 28) before class
40% 5 short (750-word) homeworks, due Wed. in class during weeks 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9
20% Final paper (1250-1500 words), due Wed. Dec. 9 by 5:00pm on Canvas

The _quizzes_, mainly multiple-choice, require you to analyze the readings. Their main purpose is to prime a lively class discussion. I will drop your 2 lowest quiz grades, so only your top 7 count.

Other items are graded as follows. I will give _collective_ feedback on the homeworks.

A  Well-executed and engages creatively with the assignment’s underlying rationale
B  Competently fulfills all aspects of the assignment
C  Gaps or problems (e.g. weak research, poor writing, superficial analysis)
D  Highly deficient (garbled, incoherent, missing critical elements)

Active engagement, in whatever form (i.e. on Zoom or otherwise), may improve your grade.
### SCHEDULE

**NOTES:**
1. Don’t forget to take the [online quizzes](#) before each Monday Zoom meeting!
2. To submit the homework, follow the hyperlink or go to [Canvas > Assignments](#)
3. See pp. 5-7 below for homework descriptions and a full bibliography

#### Week 1
**Introduction**

(Sep. 28) No Zoom. But start homework #1 and/or the Oct. 5 reading

Sep. 30 Do **homework #1**: you rank the world’s happiest countries

#### Week 2
**Health:** the coronavirus in Sweden, Denmark, and Germany

Oct. 5 Read Booth, *Perfect People*, 1-115 (esp. chs. 3, 7, 11, 12, 14), 277-94, 326-34, then these four [Coronavirus articles](#)

Oct. 7 Watch Angela Merkel’s Mar. 18, 2020 speech on the coronavirus (in German with English subtitles; click “Ja, ich bin mit allen Cookies einverstanden”)

#### Week 3
**Home:** Swedish home design and the ideal of the *folkhemmet* (1940s)

Oct. 12 Read Myrdal, *Nation and Family* (20 pp.)
Read Murphy, *Swedish Design* (30 pp.)

Oct. 14 Do **homework #2**: design a model apartment

#### Week 4
**Work:** West German capitalism and East German communism (1950s/60s)

Oct. 19 Read Wolf, *They Divided the Sky* (232 pp.)

Oct. 21 Read the *Godesberg Program* (13 pp.)

#### Week 5
**Personal safety:** Policing and society in Nordic Noir crime fiction (1960s/70s)

Oct. 26 Read Sjöwall and Wahlöö, *The Abominable Man* (215 pp.)

**Education:** the EUniWell initiative (2020)

Oct. 28 Read the [EUniWell Mission Statement](#) and study their [website](#)
Do **homework #3**: plan a study abroad term in Europe
Week 6  **Sexual freedom and gender equality**: love, lust, friendship, and family in Germany, Sweden, and Finland (1970s)

Nov. 2 Read Häberlen, *Emotional Politics* (30 pp.)
Read Larsson, *Swedish Porn Scene* (20 pp.)

Nov. 4 Read Booth, *Perfect People*, 259-74, 345-51
Re-do homework #1 but focus on gender equality

Week 7  **Nonviolent protest and political democracy**: the anti-nuclear movement in West Germany and pro-democracy demonstrations in East Germany (1980s)

Nov. 9 Read Augustine, *Taking on Technocracy* (25 pp.)
Read Bartee, *A Time to Speak Out* (30 pp.)

Nov. 11 Do homework #4: prepare to stage a demonstration

Week 8  **Racial justice and ethnic diversity**: immigration and refugees in Germany, Sweden, and Norway (1990s to today)

Nov. 16 Read Erpenbeck, *Go, Went, Gone*, 1-160

Nov. 18 Finish Erpenbeck, *Go, Went, Gone*
Read Booth, *Perfect People*, 162-74, 305-25

Week 9  **Taking responsibility for past injustices**: Hitler, the Nazis, and us

Nov. 23 Read Neiman, *Learning from the Germans* (45 pp.)
Watch *Er ist wieder da* (in German with English subtitles)

Nov. 25 Do homework #5: write a film review
Discussion of final paper assignment

Week 10  **Taking responsibility for the future of the planet**: Norway’s oil and Nordic ecomodernity

Nov. 30 Read Booth, *Perfect People*, 180-202
Read Norgaard, *Living in Denial* (45 pp.)

Dec. 2 Conclusion: preparing for the world ahead
HOMEWORKS

1. You rank the world’s happiest countries

Spend a while studying the excerpts from the United Nations’ 2019 Human Development Report that I have posted on Canvas. It’s a mess of statistics, but I’ve pulled out 5 “dashboards” that track various groups of indicators. These range from overall human development (#1) to socioeconomic sustainability (#5). Each row tracks a different country (note that German-speaking and Scandinavian countries include 9 of the world’s top 20, with Norway at #1 and Germany at #4). Each column tracks a different indicator (note that the even-numbered pages provide useful explanations of what these indicators mean, which you may want to consult).

Your assignment is to re-do the top 20 list by creating a new dashboard prioritizing the 4-5 indicators that you find most relevant to the quality of life. You should choose these indicators from the ones that are already tabulated on the various dashboards. Since we’re focusing on highly developed countries, select indicators that permit fine distinctions among this privileged group of societies. They all have superb access to basic sanitation, for example, but differ widely on things like renewable energy or the prevalence of female engineers.

You don’t have to do any more mathematics than you want to (which may be zero). What I want to see is (a) a new dashboard that charts your rankings, and more importantly (b) a 750-word explanation of how you arrived at your rankings, and what justifies your approach. Beyond these parameters, it’s up to your creativity—and again, how you value the quality of life.

Finally: pay close attention to dashboards #2 and #3 because, in week 6, we will revisit them with a particular focus on women’s and gender quality.

2. Design a model apartment

Compose a 750+ word prospectus for a model apartment in a new housing complex that embodies the principles of beauty, functionality, feminism, modernism, and social justice espoused by Ellen Key, Per Albin Hansson, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, the acceptera group, and others. Feel free to use images or drawings in addition to words, though this is not required.

Your prospectus should describe at least one room stocked with IKEA furniture that might have been available, in some form, in the 1940s/50s (the firm was founded in 1943). Use the ikea.com website and online catalog to explore. IKEA is famous for popularizing obscure Swedish words and Scandinavian placenames to name their furniture and other items (and some accuse them of naming their doormats after the Danish!). You must therefore incorporate at least three IKEA objects in your prospectus and concoct explanations (however fanciful) that tie the meanings of their names to their functional and aesthetic qualities. Use Google Translate to render English words into Swedish or Google Maps to find placename locations. If you’ve taken Swedish, feel free to provide complete furniture explanations written in Swedish.

Don’t get too carried away: the heart of the assignment is the first paragraph; read it carefully.
3. Plan a study abroad term in Europe

Spend a while studying the EUniWell [website](#) and read their [mission statement](#) closely. Then choose one of the EUniWell member universities—preferably Cologne (Köln) in Germany or Linnaeus in Sweden—and plan a term abroad there. Write an application essay expressing your desire to study, research, or otherwise participate in one or more of EUniWell’s specific academic programs and initiatives. Choose a program or initiative that you find most relevant both to your own interests and to the focus of this course.

For extra credit, hop on AirBnb and [Google Maps](#), find yourself a place to live, and figure out where you’ll shop and how you’ll get around on public transportation in your newly chosen city. You can also choose another university in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, or Scandinavia so long as you focus on a course of study central to EUniWell’s themes.

What I want to see, above all, are your thoughts on what role universities should play in studying as well as in improving the quality of life among their host countries and across the world.

4. Prepare to stage a demonstration

In advance, I will form you into teams of 3 or 4. Each team will plan a protest either against a nuclear power plant, as described in Augustine’s book; or in favor of democratic political reforms, as described in Kotkin’s (each team’s choice).

I also want you to play around with the German language. Those with no knowledge of German should design one-phase placards with images depicting your political goals. Others, with rudimentary language skills, should compose catchy chants that protestors can shout. Those who are relatively fluent should compose reasoned and impassioned two-minute speeches. Feel free to use [Google Translate](#) or [deepl.com](#), which is even better.

Be prepared to conduct your protest at the Wednesday Zoom, using the screen sharing function to show the class your handiwork. You may have to get creative. That’s part of the fun.

5. Write a film review

Write a 750+ word review of *Er ist wieder da* (“Look Who’s Back!”) in which you reflect on the film’s characterization of Hitler, and of German society’s hypothetical reaction to his return, circa 2015. I don’t want to know whether you liked the film or not, but rather your analysis of what message it is trying to send and whether that message is successful. In other words, think about what “work” the film is trying to do in reminding us not only of Hitler’s past evil, but perhaps also of the flaws in our own society (whether Germany or the U.S.) that would cause him to be successful, today, as a media star and political figure. Is it even appropriate, some 75 years after the Holocaust ended, to joke about Hitler or to portray him in a sympathetic light? Or is this film precisely the way to remind us of the lessons of the past? In this paper, I want to see you reflect on Neiman’s chapter about our obligations to remember past crimes and injustices.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOTES: (1) Asterisked (*) items are available at the UO Duckstore or on Amazon
(2) Other readings are posted at Canvas > Files > Readings and as a ZIP file


Course policies

Accessible education

Please let me know within the first two weeks of the term if you need assistance to fully participate in the course. Participation includes access to lectures, web-based information, in-class activities, and exams. The Accessible Education Center (aec.uoregon.edu) is part of the Office of Academic Advising. Students can request an instructor notification letter that outlines possible accommodations and adjustments to class design that will enable better access. For additional assistance with access or disability-related questions or concerns, contact the Accessible Education Center.

Academic misconduct

The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism.

Discrimination and harassment

Students experiencing any form of prohibited discrimination or harassment, including sex or gender-based violence, may seek information and resources at safe.uoregon.edu, respect.uoregon.edu, or investigations.uoregon.edu or contact the non-confidential Title IX office/Office of Civil Rights Compliance (541-346-3123), or Dean of Students offices (541-346-3216), or call the 24-7 hotline 541-346-SAFE for help.

As a department head, I am a “designated reporter” when it comes to matters involving student disclosures of sex and gender-based harassment and violence. For information about my reporting obligations as an employee, please see Employee Reporting Obligations on the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC) website. I am also a mandatory reporter of child abuse. Please find more information at Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect.

Other course policies

Policies regarding attendance, making up work, classroom etiquette, use of technology in class, paper formatting and citation, and recording of lectures and sharing of notes are posted online.