

Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs

German Studies Department: Literature Core, 2020

GERM1701: Constructing Deviance: Madmen, Hysterics, & Criminals (Bowles, with Stephen Pfohl in Sociology – as an Enduring Questions pairing)

GERM2163: Triumphant Calamity: The Modern Condition (Bowles)

GERM2221: Madmen, Hysterics, & Criminals: Inventing Deviance (Bowles)

GERM2239: Knights, Castles, & Dragons (Resler)

German Studies Department: Arts Core, 2020

GERM2203: Representing the Holocaust (Block)

1) **Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they?**

Formal learning outcomes for Literature Core and Arts Core courses taught in the German Studies Department have been developed in consultation with the individual instructors and department faculty as well as with the Center for Teaching Excellence and Core office staff. While specific learning outcomes vary depending on each course, German Studies Literature Core courses in general address enduring questions—How do we define ourselves against what we fear? How might we think of crisis as opportunity and innovation? How does our understanding of literature shape our conception of the world and ourselves? How might we see literature as a mode of sociological inquiry?—within the unique framework of the German literary and cultural legacy, especially since 1800. Our Arts Core course raises and addresses some of the same questions—How do we square atrocity with aesthetic representation? How do we give form to what remains inexpressible?—and focuses on the German cinematic legacy since 1945.

In pursuing answers to these queries from the vantage point of a foreign cultural tradition, we aim to provide students a German-centric intellectual perspective for examining their own cultures and values from the outside; for understanding the shifting histories of these enduring questions and any potential answers to them; for grasping the everyday relevance of critical thinking, reading, and writing; for coming to terms, through narratological training, with the power of literature to shape human experience and understanding, and to contribute to personal and intellectual formation; and for practicing and appreciating the necessity of written expression, argumentation, and research.

For GERM1701, for instance, the learning outcomes are:

“Participants in both courses are expected to cultivate the skills essential for thinking critically about theories, practices, and representations of “deviance” in literary and

sociological settings. Students in the Literature Core are expected to engage analytically with questions of difference, discrimination, alienation, exclusion, confinement, injustice, power, and (ab)normality, among others, and to articulate the various ways literature gives form to and challenges these concepts.

Students enrolling in this course will therefore be evaluated according to their progress in achieving a number of outcomes. Foremost among these is to demonstrate the ability to apply literary and sociological perspectives to the enduring question of how and why societies construct deviance. At the end of the semester in this particular course, successful students will have learned to:

genre

- be able to identify and distinguish between literary genres and subgenres.
- be able to identify and discuss major formal elements of these literary genres and subgenres.

voice

- be able to identify the narrative voice/perspective of a text.
- discuss the features and conventions (or unconventionalities) of a particular narrative perspective.
- be able to identify, understand, and discuss the ways narrative perspective shapes their interpretations of a text.

interpretation

- cultivate, further develop, and articulate strategies for approaching and interpreting new texts.
- cultivate and further develop the ability to perceive and interpret subtext, argumentation, bias, connotation, association, and metaphor.
- understand and articulate the advantages and limitations of their interpretative perspective.

expression

- understand the expressive conventions of different media.
- develop and hone the ability to express themselves using the conventions of different media.
- articulate different viewpoints about the same question, text, or problem.
- identify the limits and biases of these viewpoints.

discipline

- understand the respective approaches, methodologies, and concerns of sociological and literary inquiry.
- articulate the differing concerns of sociological and literary approaches to the same question or problem.
- understand literature as a site of sociological debate, contestation, and history.

deviance

- cultivate awareness of social, political, historical, and linguistic processes of exclusion.
- develop an understanding of how we employ these processes of exclusion and discrimination in our literary world to define ourselves and the world around us.
- articulate the limits and drawbacks of these processes and recognize the inherent limits of binary thinking.
- demonstrate an ability to think critically and in an ethically-informed manner about the poetics of deviance.

formation

- become more mindful of matters of injustice, power imbalance, exclusion, discrimination.
- develop a practice of reflecting, in whatever form, on how they might disrupt processes of injustice and exclusion.”

2) Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.

Learning outcomes for German Studies Literature Core and Arts Core courses are published on course syllabi, which are distributed to students, posted to each course’s Canvas site, and included in the university’s syllabus database for access by members of the Boston College community.

3) Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes of the course?

To assess whether students in our Core courses achieve the stated learning outcomes, we have begun instituting interim and final course assignments tailored specifically to the respective objectives of each course. In GERM2163 (formerly GERM1063), for instance, students complete three long-form writing assignments and one in-class solo presentation—one literary close reading, one thesis paper, one creative project to allow for interdisciplinary and multimedia approaches to critical response, and a teaching presentation for their peers—to demonstrate mastery of the disciplinary and thematic outcomes for this course on modernism.

In GERM1701, students completed these same three writing assignment types to practice their respective disciplinary and thematic skills, and they then proposed, designed, and completed a large final project, which they then workshopped with classmates and their two instructors and presented in a plenary session of the paired courses. The projects were designed to assess achievement of each course’s learning outcomes (listed above) and the integration of literary with sociological inquiry.

In addition to our own evaluation of student achievement, we add questions to course evaluations to survey students’ perceptions of their own achievement of the stated learning outcomes. In GERM2163, for example, the question prompts read as follows

“1. In this course, I gained deeper insight into the ways in which literary and cinematic modernism (in the German tradition) challenged conventional understandings and conceptions of meaning, language, civilization, sexuality, identity, and death.

2. Together with my peers and my instructor, I engaged in critical inquiry and reflected meaningfully on alternative ways of looking at the world through literature.

3. This course introduced me to (or helped me develop) the disciplinary practices of literary study, including close reading, textual analysis, visual analysis, critical thought, the practice of writing, and effective presentation skills.”

4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?**

Instructors interpret course-level assignments to evaluate whether students are on track to achieve course learning outcomes. Representative samples of student work are maintained in the instructors' files. Randomized examples of the large-scale, capstone-like final projects (from GERM1701 and SOCY1710) have been submitted to the Office of the Core for evaluation, along with instructor comments. Course evaluations, furthermore, are interpreted both by the instructor and the department chair, and survey results are shared and interpreted by the entire department faculty. In the case of these particular surveys of Core courses, data are also shared with the Core Program officers. Recommendations for changes in curriculum or assignments are made in consultation with department colleagues on a two-year cycle (the cycle on which these courses are typically given) at departmental meetings.

5) **What changes have been made as a result of using the data/evidence?**

After our new Literature Core course was launched in Spring 2016 and Fall 2017 (GERM2221/FREN3315/ENGL2210), the instructor redesigned the course with Prof. Stephen Pfohl of the Sociology Department in order to offer an Enduring Questions seminar as part of Core Renewal. That new course, GERM1701, was offered in Spring 2019, and data were very positive. Data from our most recent Literature Core course, GERM2221, suggest strong evidence that our students attain the desired learning outcomes:

[5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree)

1. In this course I was able to cultivate, develop further, and articulate strategies for approaching and interpreting new texts: 4.64 mean, 5 median, 5 mode

2. This course helped me understand literature as a site of cultural debate, contestation, and history: 4.82 mean, 5 median, 5 mode.

3. This course helped me recognize the limits and drawbacks of binary thinking: 4.64 mean, 5 median, 5 mode.

4. This course helped me think critically and in an ethically-informed manner about the poetics of deviance: 4.73 mean, 5 median, 5 mode.

As a result of prior assignments and surveys, however, learning outcomes for each Core course offered have been articulated more concretely and precisely, and assessments better scaffolded to prepare and guide students to achieve those outcomes.

6) Date of the most recent program review.

The most recent comprehensive departmental self-study and review took place in Winter 2012. The offerings in the Core Program by the German Studies Department were mostly recently studied and reviewed, internally, in Fall 2019. Two new courses, GERM2203 and GERM2239, were approved by the UCRC in Fall 2019; GERM2203 has not yet be taught as an Arts Core course but is slated for Fall 2021. Additional proposals for Literature Core offerings from the German Studies Department are currently, or will presently be, under review by the UCRC.