

Humanities 2588: Nazism and German Society, 1914–1945 [*Draft Syllabus—Subject to Change*]

Fall 2026
Mon. 4:30–5:50pm, Fri. 12:00–1:20pm
Rm 2465

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Course Description

This course surveys German history from 1914 to 1945, with a focus on the rise, rule, and destruction of National Socialism. Topics to be covered include World War I, the Weimar Republic, the emergence of the National Socialist movement, the racial state, Hitler's leadership, World War II, and the Holocaust. The course readings pay special attention to debates about consent, dissent, coercion, and consensus under Nazi rule. Typically, one class meeting a week will consist of a lecture, while the other class meeting will be devoted to guided discussion of assigned readings. The course does not presuppose any prior background in German or European history.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

1. Master the concepts and narratives necessary for understanding the history of Nazi Germany.
2. Be able to read and discuss challenging historical texts with an eye towards argument and evidence.
3. Write analytically about textual sources and marshal evidence to make a point.

Assessments

1. Participation (attendance and participation in group activities): 15%
This assessment engages CILOs 1 and 2. You are learning how to analyze texts, communicate and discuss with your peers, and share your findings in a public forum.
 - The class meetings will not be recorded.
 - Attendance is mandatory: It will be checked at 19 intervals during the semester (beginning after the end of add/drop period). Students must sign in on the attendance sheet in class. Unexcused absences will be marked.
 - Typically, one class a week will be devoted to discussion. Suggested questions for reading and discussion will be circulated in advance. Students will begin class by engaging in breakout-group discussions with their classmates and then report their findings to the entire class. This exercise will serve as the jumping-off point for full-

class discussion. Each student is expected to act as the group's rapporteur on at least one occasion.

- Each attendance (of 19) is worth 5% of the participation grade. Acting as a rapporteur is worth 5%. Students will not be graded on the quality or frequency of their participation. To gain a full participation score, they only need to attend all classes and speak to the class once as their group's rapporteur.

2. In-class midterm examination (Oct. 15): 30%

This assessment engages CILOs 1, 2, and 3. You are learning how to extract key themes and concepts from the readings, lectures, and course discussions, and answer short and longer-form questions that test your knowledge.

- Multiple-choice, identification, and essay questions covering the lectures and assigned readings. The examination will be closed book.
- The identification questions will be organized around key terms and concepts. Each of the terms (person, place, event, thing, idea) will be followed by several specific questions about that noun—questions that require you to explain what it is and why it mattered.
- The in-class essay will require students to pull together evidence from the first half of the course to answer a major thematic question.

3. Group presentation (Oct. 30–Nov. 7): 20%

This assessment engages CILOs 1 and 2. You are learning how to analyze texts, work together with your peers, prepare a presentation, and answer impromptu questions.

- Students will be divided into groups of approx. 5 members (after the end of add/drop period). During weeks 9 and 10, groups will give short presentations to the instructor (scheduled outside of class) on the following topic: “Why did Germans join the Nazi Party or vote for it before 1933? What did the Nazis do or say that won their support?” Each student is expected to present for 5 minutes and answer questions from the instructor.
- Presentations will be assessed as a whole and all participants in each group will receive the same grade, unless unusual circumstances (such as absence) require alternative marking.
- Students are expected to communicate with their group mates, respond to messages, and contribute their fair share of the preparation. In cases where individual students have demonstrably failed to communicate, the instructor reserves the right to transfer them into a new group.
- Students are NOT allowed to use generative AI to write their presentations. Students who are suspected of significant AI use may be asked follow-up oral questions. In the event that their ability to answer questions is deemed deficient, their grade will be adjusted accordingly.

4. Final examination (date TBA): 35%

This assessment engages CILOs 1, 2, and 3. You are learning how to extract key themes and concepts from the readings, lectures, and course discussions, and answer short and longer-form questions that test your knowledge.

- Same format as the midterm examination.
- The final examination is not cumulative; it covers only the second half of the course (since the midterm).

Grading Rubrics

The identification section of the examinations will presented students with a list of nouns. They could be persons, places, things, events, ideas. Each of those nouns will be followed by several specific questions about that noun—questions that require you to explain what it is, why it mattered, etc. For example:

BATMAN

1. What is Batman's true identity? Why does he struggle to conceal it?
2. "Gotham City suffers from the typical social problems of the post-industrial metropolis." Do you agree with this statement? Please explain why or why not
3. Describe three of Batman's enemies and explain how he defeats each of them.

An examination essay question will ask students to address a broad question by dealing with several smaller questions—like an identification question. The difference is that the question may be wider in scope (not a single noun) and the sub-questions will require longer responses. While partial credit will be awarded, the best responses will clearly answer the question, directly refer to specific sources we have read, and give concrete examples. Students are not being graded on the quality of their English prose but on the quality of their ideas and their general clarity of expression.

Group presentations receive grades based on their clarity, use of sources, and sophistication of argumentation:

- 94–100: These presentations clearly answer the question and make use of all or very nearly all the assigned sources. They provide an insightful account of how different sources agree or disagree with each other. Their presentations are delivered in a very clear and well-organized fashion. All members participate equally and there is evidence of good teamwork and cooperation. All members can thoughtfully answer questions about their contributions.
- 90–93: These presentations clearly answer the question and use most but not all the assigned sources. They compare different accounts in an insightful way but not comprehensively. The level of organization and clarity is good but not excellent. There may be evidence of unequal or uneven participation. Most members can thoughtfully answer questions about their contributions.
- 86–89: These presentations answer the question but make use of fewer sources. There is some comparison of sources but not a large amount. The presentations are generally clear but may not always be as easy to follow. Members participate more or less equally but there is evidence of uneven preparation or coordination. Some members may not be able to answer questions about their contributions.
- 80–85: These presentations answer the question but do not integrate enough sources or perspectives to adequately answer the question. There are difficulties with clarity and communication. Some may not be able to answer questions about their contributions.
- < 80: These presentations have difficulty answering the questions, do not integrate enough sources, and suffer from problems of clarity and organization. Several members are not able to thoughtfully answer questions about their contributions.

Assigned Texts

All readings are available as PDFs from the course Canvas website. Students are highly encouraged to print out the readings so that they can annotate them and study them carefully. Swiping through long texts on a computer screen, tablet, or phone is not conducive to careful reading or remembering.

At least one class meeting per week, designated on the syllabus an asterisk (*), will be devoted to discussing the assigned reading. Please complete this reading before that date and be prepared to discuss it in class. The assessments will test your comprehension of this reading.

Expectations

If you are forced to miss an examination due to illness or other emergency, you must provide a doctor's note or equivalent; otherwise, a make-up test or extension cannot be arranged. Examinations or other assessments can only be rescheduled in the event of illness or legitimate emergency.

This course enforces a zero-tolerance policy on cheating and plagiarism. If a student is found to have cheated on an exam, the case will be immediately referred to the head of the Humanities Division for further investigation. Penalties may range from a zero on the assignment to an F in the course and disciplinary proceedings by the university administration.

Course Outline and Schedule

Week 1:

Sept. 4: Introduction

Week 2:

Sept. 7: Imperial Germany and the First World War

- Catherine Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths* (2015), pp. x–xii, 1–20.

Sept. 11: Hitler in Vienna and Munich

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 21–29.

Week 3:

Sept. 14: Hitler's world view*

- Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim ([1925–26] 1998), pp. 131–44, 288–329, 659–64, 679–81.

Sept. 18: The Weimar Republic

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 29–39.

Week 4:

Sept. 21: Profiles of early Nazi activists*

- Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came into Power* ([1938] 1986), pp. 1–9, 115–86.

Sept. 25: The growth of Nazism at the grassroots*

- William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town 1922–1945*, rev. ed. (1984), pp. xii–xix, 4–68.

Week 5:

Sept. 28: Hitler's arrival in power

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 39–43.
- Dick Geary, "Who Voted for the Nazis?" (1998), pp. 8–14.

Oct. 2: The successes and limits of Nazi electioneering*

- Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, pp. 70–147.

Week 6:

Oct. 5: The establishment of the Nazi dictatorship

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 45–67.

Oct. 9: Coordination and terror*

- Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, pp. 152–200.

Week 7:

Oct. 12: **In-class midterm examination**

Oct. 16: Propaganda*

- *Triumph of the Will* (1935), dir. Leni Riefenstahl

Week 8:

Oct. 19: **No class — Chung Yeung Festival Holiday**

Oct. 23: National Socialism and German society

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 69–113.

Week 9:

Oct. 26: Social atomization*

- Allen, *The Seizure of Power*, pp. 202–264.

Oct. 30: Terror and surveillance*

- Robert Gellately, "Surveillance and Disobedience: Aspects of the Political Policing of Nazi Germany" (1999), 181–203.

Week 10:

Nov. 2: Hitler's foreign policy

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 113–21.

Nov. 6: Consent and dissent*

- Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, (1987), pp. 49–80, 187–207.

Week 11:

Nov. 9: Racial education*

- Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (2003), pp. 131–62, 190–220.

Nov. 13: Hitler's war

- **No class — the instructor is attending the Social Science History Association Conference in Atlanta, USA. The recorded lecture will be available on Zoom.**
- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 123–48.

Week 12:

Nov. 16: The Holocaust

- Epstein, *Nazi Germany*, pp. 149–209.

Nov. 20: Reckoning*

- *Taking Sides* (2003), dir. István Szabó
- **Note: Instructor will be attending the Social Science History Association Conference in Atlanta, USA. The course TA will lead class discussion.**

Week 13:

Nov. 23: **No class — Instructor will be attending the Social Science History Association Conference in Atlanta, USA.**

Nov. 27: Hitler and National Socialism*

- Hans Mommsen, “Hitler’s Position in the Nazi System” (1991)
- Ian Kershaw, “Working Towards the Führer” (1997)

Week 14:

Nov. 30: Farewell to Norheim*

- Allen, *The Seizure of Power*, pp. 267–303.