



The Quality of Life In Germany and Scandinavia

GER 300 • MW 2:00-3:20 • Winter 2020 • CRN: 26028 • 154 Straub • Prof. Ian McNeely

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. We'll blend academic analysis with individualized attention to the life goals of enrolled students, and also learn some German and Swedish along the way.

This course presumes no prior knowledge of German or Swedish. Students may earn credit towards both German and Scandinavian majors and programs.



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
THE DEPARTMENT OF GERMAN & SCANDINAVIAN

GER 300: THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN GERMANY AND SCANDINAVIA

University of Oregon – Winter 2020 – CRN [26028](#)

Instructor: Prof. Ian F. McNeely, Departments of History and German/Scandinavian

Meeting times: MW 2:00-3:20 in 154 STB

Email: imcneely@uoregon.edu

Office hours: MW 12:30-1:50 in 429 FR and by appointment

Canvas site: <https://canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/149699>

My homepage: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/imcneely>

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.

We begin by critically examining how social scientists attempt to measure happiness and the quality of life across entire countries. We then pivot squarely to humanistic approaches. Drawing on history, literature, philosophy, social criticism, design, and popular culture, we examine what it takes to live well: family and community, work and leisure, health and education, and peace and security. We also consider what matters besides leading good lives as individuals: our larger ethical obligations to past, present, and future generations. Our method will be to draw on case studies from the post-World War II period through today's news.

This course is taught in English but features exercises in German. It is open to all students, whether you know zero German or a lot, and whether or not you have any prior knowledge of the region's languages, literatures, societies, and history. It counts for *Arts & Letters* credit because it requires critical and creative thinking about ethical issues centered on the quality of life, and because it explores systems of meaning and belief, including some controversial topics, in societies that differ from the U.S. in surprising ways. It also counts *as either a GER or SCAN course* for the purposes of the German, Scandinavian, and GerScan Studies degree programs. German majors must complete assignments at the *Meister* level or count the course as an English-only course. Scandinavian majors should see me for further guidance.

Expected learning outcomes

- Acquire broad knowledge of the cultural history of German-Scandinavian Europe since 1945.
- Develop humanistic understandings of the quality of life from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including points of contact and contrast with the social sciences.
- Learn to analyze primary sources (literary works, historical documents, music, TV, consumer products, etc.) with close attention to cultural-historical context and linguistic nuance.
- Increase your disposition to use German and/or Swedish in your life and future work, through exercises that improve your proficiency no matter what your prior background is.

Language learning

What does it mean to “increase your disposition” to use another language? This is *not* a language course, but you will learn how to use at least some German to investigate important academic questions. I am a historian, not a language instructor, but I use German every day in my work. This course will show you how to do this yourself, at a level suited to your individual interest, aptitude, and prior experience—if any. Again, no prior knowledge of the language is assumed.

In order to accommodate every level of language learner, assignments are different depending on whether you are an apprentice (*Lehrling* in German), journeyman (*Geselle*), or master (*Meister*). Each assignment requires the same amount of student work regardless of level. Please choose the highest level you’re comfortable with, and feel free to ask me if you have any questions:

(L)ehrling	=	no prior German or took GER 101 or 102
(G)eselle	=	took GER 103, 201, or 202
(M)eister	=	took GER 203 or higher

Students who want to work in Swedish are welcome to do so: please see me early in the term!

Estimated workload

This class has a very regular rhythm of work. On Mondays, we typically focus on readings; expect to spend 5-6 hours on these each week. On Wednesdays, students present individual or group projects, most requiring 3-4 hours of outside research (often online) and write-up. Collaboration among students is encouraged and, for several assignments, required.

Grading

35%	9 quizzes on Canvas, one due each Monday (except Jan. 7) before class
65%	10 assignments, one due each Wednesday in class

I will drop the two lowest quiz grades and the two lowest assignment grades.

The *quizzes* test reading comprehension. Their main purpose is to promote good class discussion. Typically multiple-choice, they are graded on Canvas’s default percentage scale (A = 97%, etc.).

The *assignments* are graded on [this rubric of Core Ed objectives](#) and determined as follows:

A	Well-executed and engages creatively with the assignment’s underlying rationale
B	Fulfills all aspects of the assignment at the appropriate language level
C	Gaps or problems (e.g. weak research, poor writing, well below language level)
D	Highly deficient (garbled, incoherent, missing critical elements)
F	Radically incomplete or entirely missing

I almost never give A+s. There is no midterm or final exam. Consistent class participation may increase your final grade.

SCHEDULE (* = quiz due on Canvas before class)

Part I The quality of life in German and Scandinavian Europe

Week 1 INTRODUCTION

- Jan. 6 Watch Nena, “[99 Luftballons](#)” or Rammstein, “[Radio](#)” (R-rated!)
Assignment #0: language level assessment (required but ungraded)
- Jan. 8 *Assignment #1: plan your Bildungsreise*

Week 2 HAPPINESS STUDIES

- *Jan. 13 Read Booth, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* (a light 400 pp.)
- Jan. 15 *Assignment #2: critique the happiness rankings*

Part II The good life: critical perspectives from the region’s past and present

Week 3 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Feminism and modern home design in the Swedish welfare state (1940s/50s)

- *Jan. 20 Read Myrdal, *Nation and Family* (20 pp.)
Read Murphy, *Swedish Design* (30 pp.)
- Jan. 22 *Assignment #3: design a model apartment*
Consider starting [Deutschland 83](#) (8 episodes) this week

Week 4 WORK AND LEISURE

The quality of life on both sides of the Iron Curtain (1950s/60s)

- *Jan. 27 Read Wolf, *They Divided the Sky* (232 pp.)
- Jan. 29 Read Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels* (40 pp.)
Read the Godesberg Program (13 pp.)
Assignment #4: translate a political manifesto

Week 5 HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Lebensreform (life reform) movements and New Left politics (1960s/70s)

- *Feb. 3 Read Häberlen, *Emotional Politics* (30 pp.)
Read Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (10 pp.)

Feb. 5 *Assignment #5: shop at a Reformhaus*

Week 6

PEACE AND SECURITY

Cold War life under the threat of atomic destruction (1970s/80s)

*Feb. 10 Read Augustine, *Taking on Technocracy* (25 pp.)
Finish watching [Deutschland 83](#)

Feb. 12 *Assignment #6: plan an anti-nuclear protest*

Part III

Beyond the good life: our larger ethical obligations

Week 7

REMEMBERING THE PAST

Vergangenheitsbewältigung, Ostalgie, and Stasi files (1980s/90s)

*Feb. 17 Read Neiman, *Learning from the Germans* (40 pp.)
Watch Rammstein, “[Deutschland](#)” (R-rated!) and read on Canvas
about the controversy surrounding this video

Feb. 19 *Assignment #7: analyze East German consumer culture OR do
research in the online secret police archive*

Week 8

ENGAGING THE PRESENT

Immigration and multiculturalism: what it means to be German now (2000s)

*Feb. 24 Read Erpenbeck, *Go, Went, Gone* (320 pp.)

Feb. 26 *Assignment #8: interview an immigrant or refugee*

Week 9

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Climate change and environmental activism in contemporary Scandinavia

*Mar. 2 Read Norgaard, *Living in Denial* (60 pp.)

Mar. 4 *Assignment #9: read newspaper coverage on Greta Thunberg*

Week 10

HOW SHOULD I LEAD MY LIFE?

*Mar. 9 Read Kaag, *Hiking with Nietzsche* (272 pp.)

Mar. 11 *Assignment #10: write a prospectus for a Bildungsroman*

ASSIGNMENTS

L = Lehrling; G = Geselle; M = Meister (see p. 2 above)

- #0 **Language level assessment.** Familiarize yourself with the dict.cc and Google Translate websites. See page 2 to determine, preliminarily, whether you are an “L,” “G,” or “M.” **Ls** should look up the English lyrics to your chosen song (“99 Luftballons” or “Radio”), watch the video, and write down your interpretation of the song’s historical meaning in 100-150 words. **Gs** should look up the *German* lyrics, watch the video, and translate the lyrics into English (and don’t peek at the English lyrics!). **Ms** should try to transcribe and translate the song without even looking at the German lyrics beforehand. We will use this exercise to fine-tune your designated language level (L, G, or M) for this course.
- #1 **Bildungsreise.** On the first day of class, you will be formed into teams of three, ideally mixing language levels. Each team will plan a two-week cultural excursion (*Bildungsreise*) to Germany or Scandinavia this coming July. Choose at least two cities to visit (e.g. Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Copenhagen, Oslo) and be sure to include major museums and/or other high-cultural attractions. Assume your airfare is paid for, and that you have a total of \$6,000 among you to spend on housing, food, entertainment, and train tickets (no cars or airplanes!). **Ls** should use Google Maps, AirBnB, and Deutsche Bahn to plan routes and find lodging; **Gs** should find and translate museum guides, monument descriptions, and other similar texts; and **Ms** should write a 250-word letter in German/Swedish to a museum director of your choice to ask for a special tour for “visiting researchers from America.” The final product should be 4-5 pages long.
- #2 **Happiness rankings.** Spend about 2-3 hours conducting web research on contemporary “happiness studies,” both academic and popular. Start with the links below or other official sites (i.e. sites sponsored by academic, governmental, and recognized nongovernmental organizations). Use Wikipedia and other trusted sources to research specific social policies (education, healthcare, family leave, workers’ rights, urban zoning, etc.) that support quality of life rankings. Come to class prepared to discuss the *methodologies* these rankings use and what *assumptions* they rely on about the quality of life and human development. Make a special note of anything that surprises you—or that you’re skeptical about. Ask yourself what makes these metrics and methods academically respectable (or not) and how one might question or qualify them. Post a 500-750 word analysis on Canvas with links to the main online sources you’ve used.
- [United Nations Human Development Programme \(UNDP\) Reports](#)
 - [Eurostat \(European Commission\) Quality of Life Indicators](#)
 - [World Happiness](#) and [Global Happiness Council](#) reports (academic)
 - Various “top 10” lists from middle-highbrow venues like *Forbes* and *U.S. News* as well as [Mercer Consulting](#)

- #3 **Home design.** Create a 2-3 page prospectus for a model apartment in a new apartment 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. (You may 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 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. You must therefore incorporate at least three such objects in your prospectus and concoct explanations (however fanciful) that tie the meanings of their names to their functional and aesthetic qualities. **Ls** should use Google Translate and Google Maps for basic word definitions and placename locations; **Gs** should provide one-sentence furniture explanations written in Swedish; and **Ms** should consult me for primary-source readings (e.g. the manifestos and essays analyzed in *Swedish Design*) to engage with.
- #4 **Translating a political manifesto.** Pair up with another student at a different language level. Choose three short passages from the Godesberg Program that remind you of the mainstream American political tradition (e.g. individual freedom and the fight against totalitarianism) *but that also* illustrate key features of the European leftist-socialist tradition (e.g. solidarity, workers' rights, welfare) and the German historical experience (e.g. defeat in war). Write up a 750-word analysis contrasting the German original (available on Canvas) and the English translation, in which you unpack the nuances and connotations of individual words and phrases in your chosen passages. **Ls** should write about the resonances of English words (again, like "freedom") in U.S. political culture. **Gs** and **Ms** should compare the English translation to the German original and pick out words and phrases that have slightly or substantially different meanings (compound German words are often revealing here). Submit the final product on Canvas.
- #5 **Reformhaus shopping.** Form groups of three and go shopping for health food, beauty and wellness products, and naturopathic medicines. Read about Weleda (in [English](#) or [German](#)) and Reformhäuser (in [English](#) or [German](#)) and then visit [weleda.com](#) (for Ls), [weleda.de](#) (for Gs and Ms), or [reformhaus.de](#) (ditto). Make a list of 6-8 items and investigate their ingredient lists and product descriptions to make sure that they adhere to Reform/Bioladen standards. **Ls** should research what these standards are, whether in the traditional academic/scientific sense or the somewhat different criteria of the *Lebensreform* movement. **Gs** should translate the verbiage and descriptions on product labels available online (or on real products that you might buy or own). **Ms** should write a letter contacting food and drug manufacturers with follow-up queries to ensure that their products meet the proper standards. What you turn in should include the shopping list and all associated documentation, including images.

- #6 **Anti-nuclear protest.** Form teams of three and stage a protest against a nuclear power plant described in Augustine’s book. **Ls** should design one-phrase placards with images depicting the dangers of nuclear power; **Gs** should compose catchy chants that protestors can shout; **Ms** should compose reasoned two-minute speeches. Be prepared to conduct your protest (peacefully and quietly) in class.
- #7 **Ostalgie and Stasi files.** Here, we will juxtapose *Ostalgie* (post-reunification nostalgia for the kitschy popular culture and cheap but beloved artifacts of the former East Germany) with records of the *Stasi* (secret police), which subjected a huge proportion of the East German population to surveillance and spying, often by their own family, friends, and neighbors. **Ls** and **Gs** will focus on *Ostalgie* by consulting the *East German Handbook* (on reserve at Knight Library and also available in Friendly 202, the German/Scandinavian department lounge). Use this book to locate 2-3 examples of cultural artifacts or phenomena that illustrate both similarity to and contrast with the popular culture of the West. Describe what makes these products specifically *socialist* in their attitudes, values, and design. Scan or photograph them, post the images and analysis on Canvas, and be ready to explain them to the class. **Ms** should spend a couple of hours on the [Stasi Mediathek](#) website and locate one or more sources (at least three pages total) shedding light on the reasons why surveillance was done, the methods and techniques used to gather information, and the types of people who might find themselves either subjected to scrutiny or recruited as informants. Post your findings on Canvas and be prepared to explain them (with translations) to class.
- #8 **Refugee interview.** Here we will re-enact the difficulties immigrants and refugees confront when they arrive in Germany, Sweden, or Denmark. **Ls** will impersonate an immigrant or refugee who doesn’t speak the local language; you should prepare by devising a brief life history and a credible, well-researched explanation for why you are seeking to move to Germany. (You could be fleeing war, poverty, or oppression—or come from a middle-class educational or financial background and be seeking to resettle for other reasons. Either way, you don’t know the language well.) **Ms** and **Gs** should devise interview questions to help determine whether the interviewee is an appropriate candidate for migrant status. Be prepared to conduct these interviews in class in groups of two or three.
- #9 **Greta Thunberg in the news.** Read a German or Scandinavian newspaper on its coverage of current events related to Greta Thunberg or any aspect of climate change or environmental activism. Links to prominent newspapers of different political stripes, target readerships, and language levels (including some in English) will be given out in class. Post a 500-word and analysis on Canvas.
- #10 **Bildungsroman.** Use Kaag’s memoir as inspiration to imagine your own voyage of philosophical self-discovery, and write a 500-750 word prospectus or “pitch” to a American publisher designed to win you a book contract. This could be a nonfiction memoir or a fictionalized version of your spiritual and intellectual coming-of-age (a *Bildungsroman* of sorts).

READINGS

** = available for purchase at UO Duckstore; all other readings are posted on Canvas.*

Dolores L. Augustine, *Taking on Technocracy: Nuclear Power in Germany, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 161-84.

*Michael Booth, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia* (London: Picador, 2015).

*Jenny Erpenbeck, *Go, Went, Gone* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2017).

“Godesberg Program of the SPD (1959),” in Jan Goldstein and John W. Boyer (eds.), *Readings in Western Civilization, Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), vol. 9, 419-25.

Joachim C. Häberlen, *The Emotional Politics of the Alternative Left: West Germany, 1968–1984* (Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 35-47, 167-85.

*John Kaag, *Hiking with Nietzsche: On Becoming Who You Are* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 [1964]), xi-xiii, 1-9.

Keith M. Murphy, *Swedish Design: An Ethnography* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2015), 58-88.

Alva Myrdal, *Nation and Family: The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1945), 205-16, 398-99, 418-26

Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 40-80.

Kari Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), xii-xix, 13-31, 137-76.

Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 168-205.

*Christa Wolf, *They Divided the Sky: A Novel by Christa Wolf* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2013).

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 (<http://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>. See <https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct> for more information.

Discrimination and harrassment

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](#).