CIEE Berlin, Germany

**Course title:** Writing Berlin Stories  
**Course code:** LITT 3101 BRGE  
**Programs offering course:** Berlin Open Campus Block  
**Open Campus Track:** Language, Literature, and Culture  
**Language of instruction:** English  
**U.S. semester credits:** 3.00  
**Contact hours:** 45.00  
**Term:** Spring Block II 2020

**Course Description**
This course is designed to connect students to the city of Berlin through the study and production of non-fiction writing. In order to understand the rich and complicated past and present of this city, students read non-fiction writing about Berlin from the 1920s to the present. Students also experience the city directly through excursions to important city sites, interviewing locals, and conducting their own research. Students turn these moments of engagement into reflective essays about the sites and people they encounter.

**Learning Objectives**
By completing this course, students will:
- Analyze and critique the art of creative non-fiction writing.
- Compose reflective essays that integrate descriptions of specific spaces and places in Berlin.
- Interpret accounts of the city's highly contested landscape and development via original research and interviews.
- Construct narrative accounts from multi-layered intellectual and experiential explorations modeled on non-fiction writing about urban spaces.

**Course Prerequisites**
None

**Methods of Instruction**
The course is taught as a mixture of lectures, student presentations, film screenings, excursions, and class debates. Participation is a key component of the course and includes offering peers careful critiques and thoughtful feedback on their writing assignments. The instructor gives individual attention to each student to guide and improve their writing.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Reflections on the readings  
2. Three short essays  
3. Presentation  
4. Final writing assignment  
5. Participation  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on the readings</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three short essays</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final writing assignment</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course Requirements**

**Reflections on the readings**
The instructor provides students with prompt questions to guide them in writing of three brief reflections on the assigned readings. The reflections are approximately 400 words in length and offer an analysis of the reading, including discussion of the author's chosen subject, voice, and style.

**Three short essays**
These essays relate to major themes and readings in the course. Students incorporate their own experiences in
Berlin or outside the city in their writing. Each student's writings will be workshoped in class with peers and the instructor in a collaborative, supportive and constructive manner. Each essay is a minimum of 750 words.

Presentation

Each student is expected (together with one or two other students) to offer a 10-minute presentation on an assigned text, followed by questions posed to the class, which are meant to spark discussion.

Final writing assignment

The final assignment is a 1,900-word narrative account meant to build on writing techniques and feedback received on the short essays completed throughout the course. The assignment is due on the last class session and portions will be workshoped in class before the final due date.

Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent.

Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences for classes will lead to the following penalties:
**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.1 Beginnings

In our first session, we will go over the course’s objectives and assignments and do in-class writing exercises.

In-class reading:


Recommended:

Hart, Jack. Storycraft, 6-41.

Reflection Assignment 1:

Write a 300-word narrative about arriving to Berlin and the CIEE campus. What do you remember seeing? What did you smell? What did you find when you opened your dorm room? Bring Berlin to life through your routine, your eyes. Prompt questions will be included in the assignment posted on Canvas.

**Week 2**

Class: 2.1 Newcomers

To write well about a city, the writer needn’t be a long-time resident. This week, we focus on the experience of writing about compelling, new surroundings.

We will go over our assignment about moving to Berlin and experiencing the city as a newcomer. We will also learn about Berlin history during the so-called Weimar Republic. In 1920, a 26-year-old correspondent, Joseph Roth, arrived from Austria to Berlin, not long after the end of the First World War. He went to Berlin’s heart to write about compelling characters in What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-33.

In-class reading:

In groups, students will read one of the following selections from Roth and discuss it with the rest of the class.
Reflection Assignment 2:

Choose a vivid passage from one of the assigned sections and write a 300-word reflection about what makes it come alive to you. What works in terms of the style of writing and the imagery? What did it make you think about?

Reflection assignment 1 due

Class: 2.2 Newcomers

We will go on a walk as a class in Kreuzberg and take notes of the architecture, people who live here, character of the stores, and observe how the borough changes when we go from Bergmannkiez to Kottbusser Tor area. Make sure to bring a notebook and pen or pencil and wear comfortable shoes.

Reading:

Roth, Joseph. What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-33:
- “Going for a Walk” under What I Saw, 23-34
- “Refugees from the East” under The Jewish Quarter, 35-39
- “With the Homeless” in Displaced Persons, 63-68
- “Architecture” in Berlin Under Construction, 115-118

Short Essay 1:

Write a 750-word narrative about Kreuzberg. You're writing as if your piece were included in a book about Berlin, describing this borough to the reader. The class will read each other's writing in the next session and provide feedback to help improve it.

Reflection assignment 2 due

Week 3

Class: 3.1 Memories and Memorials

We will read about the Berlin of Nazi Germany through a first-person account of the city by reporter William Shirer, through the portrait of characters in Rory MacLean's book Berlin: Portrait of a City Through the Centuries and from William Shirer's Berlin Diary.

We workshop each other's Kreuzberg assignment. We then discuss Berlin during the Third Reich and watch selections from Alexa Karolinski's documentary Oma & Bella about two German Jewish women who returned to Germany after the war.

Short Essay 1 due

Class: 3.2 Memories and Memorials

The class will be divided into groups that will visit selected memorials to the Holocaust, including Israeli artist Micha Ullman's installation to commemorate the book burning at Bebelplatz, the Gleis 17 memorial at the Grunewald S-Bahn station, and along Pariser Straße in West Berlin.

Short Essay 2:

During your visit to the memorial site, take notes on how passersby pay attention, interact or ignore the memorial, and also take note of your own experience. Write 750 words about the extent to which a place can hold a memory. What does it mean to memorialize an experience? How close can any memorial get to an historical event and do these do the victims justice? How did you feel when you visited these sites and observed other visitors? Students will read each other's work and workshop these essays during the next class session.
Memories and Memorials

This session is dedicated to discussing class readings and workshopping students’ written assignments on the memorials.

Short Essay 2 due

Week 4
Class: 4.1 Borders

The Berlin Wall divided the city from 1961 to 1989, and during this time West Berlin had a special political status that resulted in an unusual way of life. This lifestyle gained notoriety with the 1978 publication of Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo (We Children from Zoo Station), which became the film Christiane F. We’re going to talk about Berlin stories on both sides — East and West, and – for those who could - what crossing from one side to the other entailed.

Students learn about writings on life in Berlin during the Cold War and discuss the history of the time period. Students also learn about interviewing people.

Reading:

Listening:
“Iron Curtain,” a story about Ulrike Poppe, possibly the most surveilled woman during the Cold War. Reporter Luisa Beck produces her story for Snap Judgment.


Reflection Assignment 3:
Write a 300-word reflection on the assigned reading and listening. Reflect on how individuals experienced the Berlin Wall and the East German regime. How would the wall have affected your life? How would you have reacted to the changes in your environment? What emotions did you feel while reading and listening? What similarities do you see between you and the people living then?

Class: 4.2 Borders

Outing related to meeting someone who lived during the Cold War and hearing his or her story.

Reading:

Short Essay 3:
Write a 750-word narrative about crossing a border. Where did you go? How did you feel? How did the scene change as you went from one country to the next? You should write evocatively, using vivid detail. Alternatively, students can write about leaving a place and no longer feeling welcome. Where did you go? Write about feeling unwelcome.

Reflection Assignment 3 due

Week 5
Class: Contemporary Berlin

In-class writing exercises, discussing writing techniques and contemporary Berlin.

Reading:
Schneider, Peter. Berlin Now: The City After the Wall:
  • “Berlin: Emergence of a New Metropolis”, 89-98
  • “Love After the Fall of the Berlin Wall”, 122-129
Class: 5.2 Contemporary Berlin

Class outing in which students listen to the “Green Line” episode of Berlinology as we take the U1 subway line from Warschauer Straße to Uhlandstraße to observe how Berlin changes going from East to West. The class will meet in West Berlin with a contemporary author who writes about Berlin.

Reading:

Schneider, Peter. Berlin Now: The City After the Wall:

- “Clash of the Architects”, 18-21
- “A Wessi Attempts to Find Berlin’s Soul”, 83-88

Class: 5.3 Contemporary Berlin

Students spend class workshopping the final assignment.

Reading:

Schneider, Peter. Berlin Now: The City After the Wall:

- “Vietnamese in Berlin”, 212-214
- “Turks in Berlin”, 234-246
- “Jewish Life in Berlin”, 293-308

Week 6

Class: 6.1 Workshop and Conclusion

Students workshop their final writing assignment

Reading:

Selections from Constantine, Berlin Tales

Class: 6.2 Site Visit: Aufbau Publishers

Aufbau was founded in 1945 and became the biggest publisher in East Germany, specializing in socialist and Russian literature. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the publishing house has occupied a unique intersection point, uniting two German literary cultures.

Reading:

Selections from Kaminer, Russian Disco.

**Final writing assignment due**

Course Materials

Readings


Online Resources


