

## **HON 395: Commemorating Catastrophe: The Case of Auschwitz-Birkenau (3 cr)**

Dr. Jeri Kraver

[Jeraldine.Kraver@unco.edu](mailto:Jeraldine.Kraver@unco.edu)

Office Hours T/R 11-12 and by appointment

1130C Ross Hall

SPRING 2023 / T/R (9:30-10:45)

“to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”  
--Theodor Adorno

**CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:** An advanced study of selected topics of an interdisciplinary nature for Honors Program students. HON 395 is a 3-credit hour interdisciplinary seminar

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Few events in the course of human civilization are as fraught as the *Shoah*: in all its tragic details, memory and representation are mutually entangled, politically motivated, and morally charged. As an emblem of the unspeakable horror and cruelty of the *Shoah*, Auschwitz is *sui generis*. Nearly 75 years after its liberation, the site remains at the center of any conversation that seeks to make sense of the murder of millions, to negotiate the consequences of their death, and to imagine how to mourn and commemorate their memory. For some, the conclusion of University of Waterloo's Robert Van Pelt, an authority on Auschwitz, appeals: "the best way to honor those who were murdered in the camp and those who survived is by sealing it from the world, allowing grass, roots and brambles to cover, undermine and finally efface that most unnatural creation of Man." Others, a majority, defend maintaining and even improving the site. Their reasons are multiple--from a collective national guilt, to the need to combat Holocaust deniers and revisionist historians, to the fact that, as the burial site for the murdered, it is hallowed ground. These debates raise larger questions about how we balance commemoration and national narratives, including how the ways we remember the past inflect our present. In this course, we probe these issues by considering the history and representation of Auschwitz—in multiple modes and genres--and seeking to understand the ways that these representations reflect individual experience, shape historical interpretation, impose meaning, and/or create myth. Our readings will examine questions of ethics, aesthetics, and history by considering debates and controversies about the artistic representation of the Holocaust generally and Auschwitz more particularly, as well as theoretical and philosophical discussions that have formed the core of Holocaust Studies and are applicable to other studies of trauma or tragedy.

On completion of this course students will be prepared to

- Consider how social, cultural, linguistic, religious, philosophical, and historical circumstances shape the human environment;
- Explore fundamental questions of value, meaning, and modes of expression and creativity;
- Investigate the cultural character and literatures of the human experience;
- Approach problems with greater awareness of their moral dimensions and ethical consequences.

## READINGS:

**CORE TEXTS:** There we will reading/listening assignments from each of these texts every week.

1. *Auschwitz* by Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt
2. *Auschwitz: A New History* by Laurence Rees (available on audiobook)
3. *Auschwitz: Not Long Ago. Not Far Away* by Luis Ferreiro, Miriam Greenbaum, Robert Jan van Pelt (Editor)
4. *War & Genocide* by Doris Bergen (available as an audiobook)
5. The Auschwitz Podcast

**ADDITIONAL TEXTS** appear below. Most will be made available as PDFs.

## SCHEDULE

### TOPIC: Introductions and Overview

"Intellectuals on Auschwitz: Memory, History and Truth" by Omer Bartov (*History and Memory* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1993), pp. 87-129)

From: *History and Memory After Auschwitz* by Dominick LaCapra (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1998)

### TOPIC: Auschwitz Then

Auschwitz and the Final Solution

The Auschwitz Album

Excerpts from *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi

Film: *Night and Fog*

Art: David Olere and art from The Auschwitz Collection/Lagermuseum

### TOPIC: Auschwitz Now

#### Virtual Visit to Auschwitz Birkenau

#### Auschwitz in Popular Culture

From *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes

"Modes of Representing The Holocaust: A Discussion of the Use of Animation in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Sylvie Bringas's *Silence*" by Jessica Copley (Copley, Jessica. (2010).

"The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation" by Anna Richardson (*Borders and Boundaries* Issue 5 (Summer 2005)

"The Survivor as Villain: X-men, Comic Culture and Auschwitz Fantasies" (Loewy, Hanno. (2007).

Miscellaneous readings on Pokemon, Selfies, and *The Simpsons* at Auschwitz

*Structured Academic Controversy*: Should it stay or should it go:

### TOPIC History, Trauma, and Representation

From: *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* Lawrence Langer (Yale UP, 1993)

From *Interdisciplinary Handbook of Trauma and Culture*

From *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma and Writing History, Writing Trauma* by Dominick LaCapra

“The Holocaust and Problems of Historical Representation” by Robert Braun  
(*History and Theory* Vol. 33, No. 2 (May, 1994), pp. 172-197)

From *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (Beacon Press, 2006)

### **TOPIC Representing Auschwitz: Concentrationary" Realism**

From: **The Holocaust: Literature and Representation** (A USHMM Symposium)

<https://www.ushmm.org/research/scholarly-presentations/symposia/holocaust-literature-representation>

From; *After Representation? The Holocaust, Literature, and Culture* R. Clifton Spargo And Robert M. Ehrenreich, eds. (Rutgers UP, 2010)

*This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* by Tadeusz Borowski (Penguin Classics; Reissue edition, 1992)

*Blood from the Sky* by Piotr Rawicz (Yale UP, 2003)

*Auschwitz and After* by Charlotte Delbo (Yale UP, 1995)

*Smoke over Birkenau* by Liana Millu (Northwestern UP, 1998)

Film: *The Passenger*

### **TOPIC Museum Study/Analysis:**

Excerpts from *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* by David Carr

*The Museum Experience Revisited* by John H Falk and Lynn D. Dierking

*The Textual of Memory* by James E, Young

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

NOTE: I use UNC's Standard Grading Scale: Available at:

<http://unco.smartcatalogiq.com/en/current/Undergraduate-Catalog/Undergraduate-Information-and-Policies/Student-Policies-and-Procedures/Attendance>

The writing tasks for this seminar are aligned with the **HONORS LEARNING OUTCOMES**.

1. **Creative and Critical Thinking:** Think and speak analytically with a unique sense of self in order to synthesize and demonstrate learning from multiple mediums.

In teaching “literary” texts, I ask students to think about them in terms of these Inquiry Questions:

- What does it mean to be human in the various “texts” we study?
- How or where do these writers and/or their characters find meaning—that is, what is the source of meaning for the people we meet in this text?
- What do these writers have to say about who we are in relation to the sources of meaning outside ourselves—that is, in relation to the things we hold sacred (e.g., god, law, society, etc.)?
- What can we take from these texts to help us make meaning in our world?

Under most of our topics, we will consider a selection of creative texts, including prose, poetry, drama, music, and art. **FOUR TIMES DURING SEMESTER** you will be asked to reflect on one of those texts in an essay.

2. **Inquiry Analysis and Integrative Learning:** Connect and extend knowledge from one's own academic focus to other disciplines and to the world beyond UNC.

By WEEK EIGHT each student will be asked to pose an INQUIRY QUESTION of their own that emerges from our immersion into the space, place, and history of Auschwitz. That question will be the subject of their study and their **SEMINAR PROJECT** during the second half of the semester. It will also be the subject of a series of smaller assignments (e.g., a project proposal, an annotated bibliography, and a working outline and timeline).

3. **Written and Oral Communication:** Communicate one's thoughts on paper and in speech effectively with a scholarly voice by using evidentiary support and critical reasoning, within philosophical, analytical and theoretical frameworks appropriate to the discipline. Use appropriate citation and attribution for the discipline and join in the scholarly discourse.

The seminar project (a response to the inquiry question posed by the student), can take a variety of forms from a traditional research paper to a creative project. Regardless of the mode the student selects, there will be an **ORAL PRESENTATION** to the class about their project.

4. **Intercultural Competence and Global Learning:** Become cognizant of and engage with a diverse range of cultures, religions and beliefs.

In our discussions of museums and other sites of memory, students will **ANALYZE A SITE** of their own choosing that commemorates an event of significance to a particular nation or group.

## **ADA AND TITLE IX SYLLABUS STATEMENTS**

### **Disability Resources**

It is the policy and practice of the University of Northern Colorado to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that present barriers to students' inclusion or to accurate assessments of students' achievement (e.g. inaccessible web content, use of videos without captions), students should communicate about these aspects with their instructor(s).

Additionally, if you have a temporary health condition or a permanent disability that requires accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible. DRC facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations.

Office: (970) 351-2289, Michener Library L-80.

Students can learn more here: [www.unco.edu/disability-resource-center](http://www.unco.edu/disability-resource-center)

## **Title IX**

The University of Northern Colorado is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Students who have experienced (or who know someone who has experienced) any of these incidents should know that they are not alone. UNC has staff members trained to support students to navigate campus life, to access health and counseling services, to provide academic and housing accommodations, to help with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware all UNC instructors and most staff members are required to report their awareness of sexual violence to the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC). This means that if students tell an instructor about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, the instructor must share that information with the Title IX Coordinator, Larry Loften. Larry or a trained staff member in OIEC will contact the reporting students to let them know about accommodations and support services at UNC as well as their options to pursue a process to hold accountable the person who caused the harm to them. Students who have experienced these situations are not required to speak with OIEC staff regarding the incident. Students' participation in OIEC processes are entirely voluntary.

If students do not want the Title IX Coordinator notified, instead of disclosing this information to the instructor, students can speak confidentially with the following people on campus and in the community. They can connect you with support services and help explore options now, or in the future.

### **Confidential Campus Resources**

Assault Survivors Advocacy Program (ASAP) Office Located: 2nd floor of Cassidy Hall

Office Phone: 970-351-1490

Web: [unco.edu/asap](http://unco.edu/asap)

Hours: M-F, 9am-5pm

24 Hour Hot Line: 970-351-4040

Email: [advocacy@unco.edu](mailto:advocacy@unco.edu)

UNC Counseling Center

Office Located: 2nd floor of Cassidy Hall

Office Phone: 970-351-2496

Hours: M-F, 8am-12PM, 1pm-5pm

Web: [unco.edu/counseling-center](http://unco.edu/counseling-center)

Psychological Services

Office Located: McKee Hall Room 247

Office Phone: 970-351-1645

Web: <https://www.unco.edu/cebs/psychological-services-clinic/>

Hours: By Appointment

Email: [ppsy.clinic@unco.edu](mailto:ppsy.clinic@unco.edu)

\*Staff members at confidential campus resources are not required to automatically report incidents of sexual or relationship/dating violence or stalking to the University. There are limits to confidentiality, and before speaking with a staff member, those exceptions will be outlined.

Students who are survivors, who are concerned about someone who is a survivor, or who would like to learn more about sexual misconduct or report an incident, can visit [www.unco.edu/sexual-misconduct](http://www.unco.edu/sexual-misconduct). Students may also contact OIEC at 970-351-4899 or email [titleix@unco.edu](mailto:titleix@unco.edu).

These and additional syllabus statements are also posted on Canvas in MODULE ONE: START HERE.