Dr. Heike C. Alberts

Geography 331: Geography of Europe

European Odyssey 2007 (Amsterdam and Berlin)

Tentative Course Syllabus

Course Description

Contemporary Europe is a diverse region in terms of natural landscapes, political and economic systems, languages and cultures. It is also a region undergoing far-reaching transformations, most prominently the “velvet revolutions” in Eastern Europe since the late 1980s and the increasing integration and cooperation of European countries in the European Union. The diversity and rapid changes make studying Europe both interesting and challenging for geographers.

In this class we will explore five broad topic areas. We will begin by looking at the current social setting, such as demographic characteristics of the population, languages and religions, ethnic conflict and migration. Next we will study the physiographic regions of Europe, natural resources and environmental challenges, before turning our attention to the basic features of the European economy. We will then explore Europe’s urban history from ancient times to today. Finally, we will focus on the most important political developments after 1945 and examine the challenges and chances of European integration.

We will cover some of these topics in lectures and class discussions, but on many days we will actually look at concrete examples in Amsterdam and Berlin. I was born and raised in Berlin, so I very much look forward to showing you my city and teaching you about the geography of Europe there and in Amsterdam!

Teaching Philosophy

For me learning is an interactive process, with both teachers and students learning from one another. I do not see you as containers in which I pour knowledge. I also do not see you as sponges that readily absorb whatever is presented to you. Rather I see you as individuals with different backgrounds and histories, strengths and weaknesses, and styles of acquiring and processing information. I will give you plenty of opportunity to be active in class, and hope that you will enjoy our explorations of Amsterdam and Berlin. In my opinion, getting to know a place through personal experience is much better than learning about it in lecture. However, to get the most out of this experience, you have to be active in soaking up as much information as you can during our stay in these two fascinating cities.
Required Readings
I selected a few academic articles and book chapters for you, which you can purchase from me for the cost of photocopying. I expect you to do your readings before coming to class. While most of the readings are quite simple, two articles are a bit more difficult. I expect you to do your best in working through this material.

Class Policies
- Since we will cover a lot of material in one day and lectures complement, rather than duplicate, reading materials, it is important that you do not miss any class days and participate actively in the activities we are doing.
- This class is only two weeks long, so it is important that you meet all deadlines and don’t fall behind with the class material. I will deduct points if your assignments are late.
- Academic honesty and integrity are expected at all times. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be handled according to university guidelines.
- Incomplete (I) will only be given in exceptional circumstances.
- Please be respectful at all times towards your fellow students, the instructor, and other people we will encounter during our time in Berlin. Be critical of ideas, not people; listen to and respect everyone’s ideas even if you don’t agree. Remember that you are a guest in the countries we visit and behave accordingly.

Exams and Grading
Your grade will consist of the following components:
- Exams: The two exams consist largely of short answer questions, but there may also be a short essay. Each exam is worth 25% of your grade.
- Book review: You will be asked to write a critical review of a book. I will inform you about possible titles before we begin the Odyssey. If you want, you can complete this assignment before going on the European Odyssey. Your book review counts 20% of your grade.
- Opinion/discussion papers: You will write two papers about controversial topics. Each opinion paper is worth 15% of your grade.

All assignments can be turned in hand-written, but the hand-writing has to be clearly legible. Chicken-scratch or otherwise sloppy assignments will not be accepted.

Course grades will be based on the following table:

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Students with Special Needs
It is university policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Please contact me as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations you might need and provide appropriate documentation.
Schedule

Amsterdam

Monday, May 7
- Topics: Introduction, The Changing Political Map, Languages in Europe
- Introductory Walking Tour

Tuesday, May 8
- Topics: Religious Issues and Ethnic Conflict in Europe
- Fieldtrip: Anne Frank Huis
- Assignment: Opinion paper about the headscarf debate

Wednesday, May 9
- Topics: Physiographic Regions, Climate, Agriculture and Economy
- Fieldtrip: Aalsmeer Flower Auction and Cruquius Pumping Station

Thursday, May 10
- Topics: Energy, Resources, and Environment
- Optional Fieldtrip to Zaanse Schans Open Air Museum

Friday, May 11
- Exam I
- Topic: Urban Geography I
- Fieldtrip: Walking Tour of Amsterdam

Berlin

Monday, May 14
- Topic: Urban Geography II
- Fieldtrip: Walking Tour of Historic Berlin

Tuesday, May 15
- Topics: Population Issues and Migration
- Fieldtrip: Walking Tour of Contemporary Berlin
- Assignment: Opinion paper about the ICC (or similar topic)
Wednesday, May 16
- Topics: Transportation Issues
- Fieldtrip: Berliner Verkehrsgewerbe

Thursday, May 17
- Topics: The Cold War, The European Union
- Readings: tba

Friday May 18
- Exam II
- Fieldtrip: Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp
- Hand in Book Review