European Perspectives; Contemporary Culture and Politics
IS 195E (2 units) - Syllabus

Short description

European Perspectives; Contemporary Culture and Politics (IS 195E, 2 units) This course is an integrative seminar for students participating in Westmont’s Europe Semester. The overarching goal of the course is to help the students get the most out of their travel and study abroad experience; by helping them understand and process it intellectually, culturally, emotionally, and spiritually. As they go abroad to experience other cultures, to meet people, and to share ideas and beliefs, the students will learn to reflect upon and describe what they are seeing. After reading some background books, the students will also read and report on a variety of news sources which represent a wide spectrum of ideas and ideology.

1. Course Rationale:

The intent of the course is to help you to integrate much of what is experienced outside of the normal required 12 units of Civilization and Religious Studies courses. My goal in this course is to have a venue for formally engaging you in what you are experiencing on a day-to-day basis, traveling and living in other cultures. This would include as examples the home-stay weekend, required church visits, university tours, cultural events, cultural history museums, theatre and musical performances, local news media, and chance encounters and discussions with locals. In addition, when an historical site is visited for the required courses, you will be asked to also make observations about how the local culture experiences and reacts to the site. Formal classroom time will be used to discuss all of these experiences to build an on-going conversation concerning what we as individuals and as a group might be observing, questioning, and reflecting upon the various populations and places we visit. I am also interested in conversing and thinking with you about the phenomenon of overseas travel and how it affects us personally and what it means to be a world citizen.

Questions will be asked such as:

A. What distinguishes tourism from academic travel?
B. How as Americans and Christians are we seen and treated by those in the countries in which we travel?
C. What differences are noted between the places and events which make up what might be called the "Grand Tour of Europe" (museums, renowned cathedrals, historic sites, hotels, etc.) and in the homes and workplaces of everyday citizens of the countries we visit?
D. Can a fruitful and important distinction be made between conducting a semester abroad as pilgrims rather than tourists? Can that distinction ever be fully demarcated?
E. What countries make up the EU (and which do not) and how is their individual influence felt and displayed?
F. What can we learn and describe about the plurality of Christian and non-Christian expressions of religious faith and spirituality across Europe?
G. How is the U.S. and its foreign policy, politics, and international presence experienced in the various places we travel?
H. How do stereotypes influence the way we see ourselves and the Europeans we encounter? How do these stereotypes change as we progress through the trip?
I. How do art, music, film and other media of the lands we visit capture or distort what we observe?

2. Course Tasks:

   A. You will prepare for the trip by reading at least three summer books aimed at sharpening your skills as observers and recorders of your experience.
   B. You will conduct research during the summer on a country we will be visiting and present a summary to the full Europe Semester group. Your part of a City Report will focus on the current culture and politics.
   C. You will keep abreast of current political and cultural events by regular reading of the daily press and/or online resources, which represent different ideologies and perspectives.
   D. You will learn and practice the skills of a travel writer by keeping a journal and including assigned writing activities.
   E. You will lead special mealtime conversations around a topic which you have researched.
   F. You will conference with the professor near semester's end as a capstone evaluative conversation on the themes of the course.

3. Course Procedure and Assessment:

   A. The course is offered only for honors/pass/no-credit. This will allow us to explore and develop together without the added pressure of strict evaluation. However, to receive credit for the course you must complete all of the requirements and take part in all of the group discussions, making significant contributions to the class.
   B. The seminar will run the entire semester dividing the time about equally between formal meetings in a classroom setting and casual meetings in smaller groups.
   C. While Prof. Marten will facilitate the course, other leaders may be involved in the smaller group discussions.
   D. A 3-4 page essay on one of the summer readings will be assigned and is due at the start of the trip.
   E. The journal will be turned in and assessed at the end of the course.
   F. Students will also be assessed on their class presentations and participation.
   G. A final reflective essay will be written in the journal.

4. Summer Reading:

   A. Alain De Bollon, *The Art of Travel*
   B. Sean, James and Tim O'Reilly, *The Road Within*
   C. J. Daniel Hess, *Studying Abroad/Learning Abroad*
   D. Title to be selected
      For this last reading assignment, I want you to find your own book to read that you think will be helpful to you on the trip. I suggest going to several bookstores and exploring the travel section for travel writing books. For longer books like *The Road Within*, you may choose a section to write about.

5. Newsmedia:

   Print:
   *International Herald Tribune*
   *USA Today*
   TV: CNN-International; BBC World; Sky News
   Internet: Deutsche Welle (Online English edition)
   (and other online local sources)