

Exploring Berlin Museums - Memory, Collecting and Display

4 January – 15 January

CATEGORY Cultural Studies & Religion

COURSE STRUCTURE

You will receive a total of **45 hours of academic lessons** (one lesson equals 45 minutes). Lessons will comprise lectures, group work, discussion sessions, and excursions.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

HUWISU courses are grouped into different time sessions. Your course will take place in the **MORNING SESSION**.

Monday-Friday: 9:30 pm – 1:30 pm (except on the first Monday: 12:00pm - 2:15pm)

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in **English**, including the readings. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, a language-level of B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required.

TARGET GROUP

Undergraduate students of **all disciplines**. It is well suited to students interested in history, sociology, cultural studies, urban studies, ethics, museum studies, and related fields.

CREDITS & CERTIFICATES

Participants will receive **6 ECTS** credit points and a certificate if they attend regularly (at least 80% attendance), participate actively and fulfil all course assignments. Additionally, six weeks after the end of the course a Transcript of Records is issued by Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to the academic program, you are invited to **join our cultural and social programs**. We offer a fine selection of interesting activities that aim to give you an unforgettable stay in Berlin. Through excursions, social gatherings, and sport activities, you have the opportunity to get to know the city, the university, and to meet students from all parts of the world. **Costs for these offers are included in the program fee.** Below, you find examples of previously offered cultural activities. You will be informed about the respective cultural program shortly before the start of the program via email as well as during the course period.



POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDED TOURS

- Federal Chancellery (*Bundeskanzleramt*)
- German Parliament (*Bundestag*)
- House of Representatives (*Abgeordnetenhaus*)
- Topography of Terror exhibition
- Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office

CULTURAL GUIDED TOURS

- Kreuzberg Tour
- Museum Island (*Museumsinsel*)
- Berlin Cathedral (*Berliner Dom*)
- Daytrip to Potsdam
- Exhibitions

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

- Welcome Session
- Ice Skating
- Farewell Party

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions in the classroom: Be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: Complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment in class: Pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers').

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical) especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct.

Attendance policy: No unexcused absences are permitted. Students must follow teachers' instructions to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the HUWISU office.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As early as 1706 Berlin was referred to as Athens on the Spree as homage to its burgeoning Prussian culture and museum landscape. Today, Berlin boasts well over 200 museums. In this course, we will explore a number of museums that highlight key aspects of Berlin's history. The focus will be on the key issues of memory – especially that of WWII – and collecting practices – how did certain objects find their way here? How are such histories displayed and transmitted today? These are the questions that we will address as we explore the museums as dynamic fields that can inform our understanding of how Berlin presents itself both inwardly (in smaller city museums) and outwardly in larger, world-famous museums.

This course is anthropologically inflected and treats the sites as field sites to be explored empirically and analyzed critically. It is well-suited to students who are interested in history, the social sciences, and/or more specific fields such as urban studies, ethics, or museum studies.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The aim of this course is to explore the Berlin musicological landscape using anthropological field methods. The students will actively approach the sites and reflect on them interactively, using a constant comparison methodology. A key learning outcome is to build critical thinking skills in order to read the sites and materials in a way that is conscious of the politics of representation, historical practices, and power asymmetries. This involves interrogating the varying ways museums function: who do they serve? What messages do they display? How are memory and history represented and displayed? - by whom, with whom, and for whom? This careful and conscious interpretation also serves to develop an awareness of the students' own positionalities: Where do they fit in these discussions? What knowledge and experience do they bring to the topic? This self-reflexive approach is particularly fruitful in international contexts where students come from a variety of national and academic backgrounds. The aim is to create a learning environment where students can gain knowledge and insight not only from the instructor and the material, but also via comparisons with and from each other.

READINGS

Reading materials will be available via Moodle during the course. Some additional current events readings will be made available via Moodle closer to the time.

Required:

1. Ostow, Robin. (2007). "From Displaying 'Jewish Art' to (Re)Building German-Jewish History: The Jewish Museum Berlin." In Vijay Agnew (ed.). *Interrogating Race and Racism*. University of Toronto Press. 289-319.
2. Purin, Bernhard. (2008). "Building a Jewish Museum in Germany in the Twenty-First Century." In Robin Ostow (ed.). *Revisualizing National History*. University of Toronto Press. 139-155.
3. Puzon, Katarzyna. (2019). "Participatory matters: access, migration, and heritage in Berlin museums." In Heike Oevermann and Eszter Gantner (eds) *Securing Urban Heritage*. Routledge.
4. Dresser, Sam. Ed.(2020). "Nefertiti's Bust" In *Psyche*. Online publication (Feb. 2020)

ASSIGNMENT INFO

In order to be granted 6 ECTS, students are required to

1. participate actively in all classes,
2. do the readings in time and preparing discussion questions on them in advance,
3. take part in a presentation during class time.
4. hand in a written research report (5-7 pages: 1250-1750 words), double-spaced, 12 font, Times New Roman), which can be based on the presentation. Details re: due date is two weeks after the end of the course. The content should reflect the interests of the students as well as what will be explored together throughout the course.

Note: Although this course is aimed at undergraduate students, Master's students are welcome. The requirements can be adjusted as follows: i: two additional readings (details tba), ii. one further independent site visit and reflection paper, and iii. The research report should be 8-10 pages (2000-2500 words) in length. Extra requirements can also be negotiated in cooperation with the student and their home institution

The final grade will be composed in equal measure (25%) of I.) participation grades, this is for attendance in class discussions; II.) preparation of the readings; III.) the presentation; IV.) the individual research report.

Failure to fulfill one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Victoria Bishop Kendzia's teaching method, although anthropologically inflected, is interdisciplinary in nature and is, therefore, not limited to the social sciences.

It appeals to students from a wide variety of academic backgrounds from history to art, through to geography, theology, and politics. The focus of her work is on the urban landscape, especially, but not only, museums and memorials in and around Berlin.

In this context, locations are approached as field sites that can be read, explored, and critically analyzed as dynamic sites that project and reframe key aspects of history and culture. The urban laboratory that is Berlin is particularly well-suited to this endeavor, given the historical and cultural upheavals it has witnessed during the 20th century.

She defended her dissertation entitled: The Jewish Museum Berlin: Visitor Experience in the Context of Political Education in 2013 at the Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University Berlin under the supervision of Prof. Wolfgang Kaschuba and Prof. Sharon Macdonald. Her doctoral work was based on ethnography of young Berlin-based high school students in and around the Jewish Museum Berlin.

She has a background in Museum Studies, having completed her master's degree in this field from the University of Toronto, Canada in 2001 and her Bachelor of Arts Honours at the same university in 1999. She has been publishing scholarly articles in her field since 2009 and teaching at the university level since 2008. Her most recent publication is the monograph, (December) 2017 Visitors to the House of Memory. Political Education and Identity at the Jewish Museum Berlin. London and New York: Berghahn Books. A paperback edition of this monograph was published in 2020.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – Memory of WWII

Mon. 04 Jan: Introduction to the course and to key post WWII musicological trends. Discussion of the concept of self and other and introduction to the ethnographic methods.

Tue. 05 Jan: Excursion to the Jewish Museum Berlin using ethnographic field methods

Wed. 06 Jan: Lecture and visit to a relevant site. ((details to be announced (tba)))

Thur. 07 Jan: Visit to a key Museum with tour (details tba)

Fri. 08 Jan: Lecture and Walking Tour of key sites.

WEEK 2 – Collecting and Display in Berlin Museums

Mon 11 Jan: In class Discussion of visits and the readings assigned for the week (Ostow 2007, Purin 2008)

Tue. 12 Jan: Visit and Tour to national museum (details tba) (Likely the German Historical Museum)

Wed. 13 Jan: Lecture and Visit to a relevant smaller museum (details tba)

Thurs. 14 Jan: In class discussion and workshop on sites using further ethnographic methods. Discussion of the required readings (Puzon 2019, Dresser 2020)

Fri. 26 June: This final class is dedicated to short student presentations on their chosen topics/sites. Summary discussion, feedback.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: August, 2026.